

DEAD LOVERS

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*Erotic Bonds and the
Study of Premodern Europe*

BASIL DUFALLO AND PEGGY MCCRACKEN, EDITORS

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CONTENTS

Introduction

Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken 1

CHAPTER 1.

The Best Lover

David M. Halperin 8

CHAPTER 2.

Propertius and the Blindness of Affect

Basil Dufallo 22

CHAPTER 3.

Wilfred Owen's Adonis

J. D. Reed 39

CHAPTER 4.

Embracing the Corpse

NECROPHILIC TENDENCIES

IN PETRARCH

Alison Cornish 57

CHAPTER 5.

Orpheus after Eurydice

(ACCORDING TO ALBRECHT DÜRER)

Helmut Puff 71

CHAPTER 6.

Dead Letters

Catherine Brown 96

CHAPTER 7.

"Until Death Do Us Part?"

THE FLESH AND BONES OF POLITICS

IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez 106

CHAPTER 8.

Dead Children

BEN JONSON'S EPITAPH

"ON MY FIRST SONNE"

Silke-Maria Weineck 128

CHAPTER 9.

"Give Sorrow Words"

EMOTIONAL LOSS AND THE

ARTICULATION OF TEMPERAMENT

IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Michael Schoenfeldt 143

Contributors 165

Index 169

INTRODUCTION

Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to enter the affective world of the dead, to embrace death as a site of erotic attachment? The figure of the dead lover invites us to ask how we love the dead and how such love finds a place—or not—in our wider affective lives. From Eurydice to Laura and beyond, dead lovers call forth powerful expressions of grief, sorrow, love, and longing. They occasion mourning and other rituals and seem to be intrinsically bound up with changing ideas of subjecthood itself. The notion of a vanished erotic bond, together with its tenuous preservation in language, images, performance—indeed, in virtually all of the myriad resources that culture has to offer—imbues the dead lover with essential paradoxes that challenge our very understanding of desire, culture, and ourselves. The dead lover confronts us with the possibility that all desire is founded on lack, that cultural production is always a means of substitution, prosthesis, or fetishization, and that what we call our “selves” is incomprehensible without reference to an other both present and absent, ineluctable and yet lost.

A concern with loss unifies this volume’s explorations of the dead lover in the literature, art, and cultural narratives of premodern Europe, with a look forward to its development in early modern Europe. While in a certain sense these essays return to origins, they are far less concerned with nostalgia, a longing for return, than with loss and the turn toward loss as a site of affect. We wish to emphasize this focus on loss at the outset because we feel it offers the best way to understand how this collection of material spanning some two thousand years of European history illuminates a common set of problems.

The death of a lover is the loss of a beloved body, and the possibility that this body itself might continue to be an object of erotic interest has, to be sure, unsettling connotations. And yet scholars of pre- and early modernity are faced with startling examples of this phenomenon, unaccountable as sheer perversity. Insistence on a physical bond with the dead is madness, but the

insistent embodiment of loss in the figure of the dead lover may also construct a place of agency, as we are reminded by Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez's reading of Queen Juana I's peregrinations with her husband's cadaver. The continuing possession of the lover's dead body, in whatever form, suggests a reluctance to acknowledge loss but is also the assertion of a singular identity—the living lover of a dead lover—whose claims must be reckoned with rather than simply rejected. The conjunction of eros and mourning is a defeat of death, one that may become the basis for other kinds of authority, including, in Juana's case, sovereign power.

Indeed, while an erotic bond itself is irreducibly personal, mourning, the act of mourning, ultimately implies a communal audience, particularly in the early cultures represented here. Mourning is an activity, a practice, a performance in which others are invited to share regardless of their proximity, in personal terms, to the deceased. This is one reason why staged mourning rituals, or their literary equivalents, take on a political significance arising from the way in which mourning, along with associated acts of praising, speaking for, or otherwise evoking the dead, are carried out. In his famous *Elegy* 4.7, for example, Propertius calls up the ghost of a lover, Cynthia, for an audience of Romans whose connection with Cynthia herself (if she existed) was negligible in comparison with its interest in the cultural status of Rome's traditional death rituals, and their place, whether real or literary, in the new political environment of the Augustan Principate. Basil Dufallo's reading of this poem, like Sánchez's interpretation of Juana, shows how the representation of dead lovers can make the *display* of eroticized bonds with the dead an issue of collective, rather than merely personal, significance.

Attempts to understand the therapeutic value of grief pervade ancient, medieval, and early modern thought about death and the loss of loved ones—and, again, make dead lovers a topic of collective interest. The ongoing application of classical ethics and Galenic physiology to ideas about corporeal regulation, while assuring a deep suspicion of the passions into early modernity, ultimately gives rise to fundamental shifts in attitudes toward grief and its expression. Grief over the loss of a physical bond could be thought to have physical consequences, described as the collection of corrosive substances in the body. Along with English Protestantism's discouragement of excessive mourning comes a renewed emphasis not only on physical purgation but also on cries, groans, and even expressive language, the verbal counterpart of physiological techniques, as means to avoid the excessive buildup of corporeal residues, a

danger to the body's integrity. As Michael Schoenfeldt reveals, Shakespeare's plays not only abound in such scenes of "speaking grief" but also suggest how the topic of love for the dead is linked to new notions of interiority while forecasting the development of modern ideas of personality based on an experience of loss.

Reactions to the death of a lover share characteristics with reactions to the deaths of other loved ones, not least their capacity to enhance identity and allow for the development of persona. As Silke-Maria Weineck shows through a reading of Ben Jonson, the early modern subject may be constructed as father and poet by writing (the presence of) lost children. Writing about the lost body is a powerful vehicle for writing about writing, with the literary text becoming the body's stand-in and the author self-inscribed as both engenderer and murderer at once. This phenomenon prompts the question, moreover, of whether, conversely, writing about the loss of the past may in essence be writing about lost bodies and their incalculable traces in culture, a question Catherine Brown addresses in her account of "dead letters."

If so many dead lovers occasion an affective turn toward loss, the aftermath of such "turning toward" may ultimately be a turning away. This is to say that the dead lover both is and is not the end of the story and in more than one sense. Orpheus's story does not end with Eurydice, Helmut Puff reminds us, but with Orpheus in his new role as the first lover of boys. The dead lover may prompt the turn toward a living lover and toward a change in the object of love. At the same time, however, the dead lover may embody the initial attractions of the loved object itself for the (male) subject in love. Death, as David M. Halperin points out, marks in this sense the fulfillment of love rather than its conclusion. Another way to say that the dead lover is not the end of the story is to remark both the project and the burden of living with/in loss. Living in the "dead" city of Rome, Alison Cornish suggests, is the precondition for Petrarch's love poetry for the dead Laura, whose erotic attraction is thus always already tinged with political ambition. But projects of revival, like Petrarch's, whether envisioned in political or erotic terms, are perpetually threatened by the prospect of living without hope of the dead body's revival. When the relationship to a dead lover, moreover, ends up as a relationship to oneself, the possibility of revival is further undermined. The figure of Adonis in the ancient Greek poet Bion, J. D. Reed shows us, informs Wilfred Owen's depiction of a mutilated soldier deprived of youth and beauty through the violence of war. The lover's beautiful death, for Owen's soldier, hovers painfully beyond reach,

and yet its recollection, for Owen himself, becomes the recuperation of a literary tradition about a marginalized eroticism.

It is the claim of this volume that the study of dead lovers—figured, perhaps, in Owen's evocation of Adonis—has something to tell us about our own investment in a “dead” but eroticized past that we seek to recover, with “we” here understood primarily as “scholars,” those passionate, obsessive searchers after lost objects for whom notions of distance, objectivity, and dispassion have traditionally been founding disciplinary principles. Some of the contributors engage with this claim directly (especially Dufallo, Brown, and Schoenfeldt), but it is our hope that the collection as a whole will encourage further reflection on its validity. With the status of authoritative knowledge of the past more open than ever to scrutiny and questioning, the way toward a truthful account must, we feel, lie in combining introspection with efforts of recovery. The self-critical regard we seek to foster here presupposes a dialogic relationship between researcher and material, subject and object, analogous, for example, to the transference relationship of psychoanalysis—except that the past does not actually respond to our promptings, however much the phantasmagoria of its return informs our approaches, inflames our longing.

While the trope of dead lover links these essays thematically, we see no single theoretical model informing the concerns of all of them, nor did we wish to impose one. The topic's timeliness, however, clearly emerges from its connection not only to the issues outlined here but to still others of wide import, including the history of scholarship and nonscholarly modes of reception, the relationship of gender and creative engendering, and the play between the verbal and the visual. At the same time, the collection as a whole traces the development of a major theme in the Western tradition. Thus the arrangement of the essays is essentially chronological.

David M. Halperin's essay, which in some ways extends this introduction, seeks to explain the appeal of the dead lover as an object of masculine desire through a survey of some of the more memorable examples of the trope in Western literature, art, opera, and film. Observing the status of the lover's living body as both vehicle and obstacle, offering and withholding what the male subject desires, Halperin suggests that death (like sleep) restores its otherness and inaccessibility, the very characteristics responsible for its erotic appeal.

Basil Dufallo examines the implications of the scholarly response to the Roman poet Propertius's *Elegy* 4.7, on the return of his dead lover Cynthia's

ghost. Noting the recurrent desire to use the poem as a window into the affective life of the poet himself, Dufallo proposes that this desire has tended to exclude the collective concerns of Propertius's Roman audience, which are nonetheless partly responsible for the poem's form. The technique, Dufallo argues, of "calling up the dead" in republican political oratory finds in elegiac counterpart in Propertius's "evocation" of Cynthia's spirit. Such a transformation of public techniques into the simultaneously public and private world of erotic elegy would have been likely to appeal to the subjects of Rome's first emperor, Augustus, who pursued his own "restoration" of republican traditions in the cultural activity he fostered.

J. D. Reed takes us from scholarly to literary reception through Wilfred Owen's reworking of another dead lover from classical antiquity: Adonis as depicted by the largely neglected Greek poet Bion. In "Disabled," Reed maintains, Owen adapts the Bionic tradition of wonder over the dying Adonis's youthful beauty for the depiction of an injured young soldier. Such replacement of glamorous death with ghastly survival represents Owen's response to contemporary English poetics, in particular the Decadent and Uranian poets' use of the same tradition, and sheds welcome light on the post-Romantic fascination with Adonis's homoerotic potential.

Examining the intersection of Petrarch's idea of Rome and his love of Laura in Canzone 53 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, "Spirto gentil," Alison Cornish explains the necrophilia implicit in the poem's exhortation to restore a "dead" and decadent Rome to its former glory. Through comparison with the explicit imputations of necrophilia found in Petrarch's retellings of derogatory fables about Charlemagne, Cornish reveals that the poem's nationalistic aspirations function as the subtext of Petrarch's expressed feelings for the dead Laura. Collecting Rome's "scattered members" permits Petrarch's identification of himself with imperial glory and so his metaphorical conquest of Laura in the "laurel" that he can thereby claim to have won.

A little-known component of the myth of Orpheus—his existence *after* Eurydice, when he became the first lover of boys—is the focus of Helmut Puff's essay on Albrecht Dürer's 1494 drawing *The Death of Orpheus*. Puff explores how the idea of Orpheus as "the first bugger" complicates and challenges received notions of the pacifier, *theologus*, and archpoet and how it coexists with tellings that turn Orpheus into an exemplar of virtue, eloquence, and art. As recounted in Ovid, medieval theology, and courtly literature, as well as in the iconography of the German Renaissance, the story suggests Dürer's image as

“a work of translation” bringing to the fore the act of translation itself, “a tension-prone process that arrests our gaze.”

Catherine Brown explores the boundaries of scholarship and personal reflection in “Dead Letters,” a piece that breaks with the conventions of scholarly discourse so as to enfold them within its critical regard. Pursuing a pressing concern with the affective bond between scholars and their subject matter, Brown considers the paradoxical interplay of survival and irretrievability in the formation of that bond, the special problems posed by the past’s physical remains, and the place of wonder in the production of knowledge. Her focus on these themes leads her to a diverse array of ancient and medieval material, from Howard Carter’s discovery of Tutankhamen’s tomb to the “Tremulous Hand” of a thirteenth-century scribe to nineteenth-century fantasies of recycling mummy cartonnage into newspaper.

Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez’s study of the sixteenth-century Castilian queen Juana I (“The Mad”) shifts our attention from artistic representation to a historical “dead lover”: Juana’s husband, Archduke Philip “the Handsome,” for whose embalmed corpse his wife staged an elaborate three-year display of mourning and amorous attachment. Sánchez reveals how the pose of a lover allowed the Castilian Juana to reformulate power relations among religious, social, and political spheres so as to challenge the claims of Flemish Burgundians, who likewise sought control over the dead monarch’s remains. Juana’s behavior, for which she acquired a reputation for insanity, emerges as a strategy for retaining her role as ruler and guarantor of political stability.

Silke-Maria Weineck broadens the scope of the collection by concentrating not on dead lovers per se but on the closely related theme of dead children, as treated by Ben Jonson in “On my first Sonne.” Weineck focuses specifically on the tension in the poem between ancient Greek and Christian ideals of paternity. While Jonson laments the loss of his “best piece of poetrie”—a loss that, ironically, seems recovered in the very act—he nevertheless aims at an “absolute” paternity of his own. This he imagines through the absence of the mother who makes paternity possible yet contaminates it and of the God who grounds fatherhood and yet necessarily subverts it. “On my first Sonne,” Weineck asserts, is a poem both beautiful and murderous, “honest” in exposing its own filicidal mendaciousness.

Michael Schoenfeldt concludes the collection with a study of the physiology of grief. Tracing from its classical roots a specifically medical discourse encouraging the need to master the passions, Schoenfeldt explores the ways that

speech, in the English Renaissance, came to be viewed as a venue for purging fierce and corrosive emotions. He then turns to two of Shakespeare's plays, *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, so as to reveal how each develops around contested responses to grief and mourning: the need to release the pressure that builds up in the suffering subject, and the moral discourse discouraging the indulgence of grief. Here, Schoenfeldt maintains, we glimpse the mutation of the passions from phenomena suffered by the individual into interior sensations congealing into what we now call personality, a transition that can tell us much about the genesis of our own notions of identity and emotion.

Although no single theoretical model informs all of these essays, they nevertheless engage with widely influential works of theory and cultural history that will be familiar to academic readers from a variety of disciplines. Alison Cornish, for example, develops Thomas Greene's seminal study of Renaissance imagery of exhumation, *The Light in Troy*, to describe Petrarch's related impulse toward a figurative necrophilia. Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez remarks the challenge posed by Juana I's eccentric treatment of her husband's corpse to Kantorowicz's analysis of "the king's two bodies." Stephen Greenblatt's now famous expression of "desire to speak with dead" is Michael Schoenfeldt's touchstone for linking the endeavors of literary criticism to the historical impulses he examines. Nicholas Watson's essay, "Desire for the Past," referenced by Basil Dufallo, should also be considered a primary influence on the scholarly trends that make a collection of this kind both possible and timely. In Watson's study, moreover, the reader will find bibliography pertaining to a topic whose virtual absence from this volume reflects the abundance of excellent existing work and the editors' decision to pursue related avenues of research that may, we hope, provide new perspectives on such interests of others: the topic, that is, of Jesus as a dead lover.

If scholarly interest in dead lovers offers a particularly compelling view into the motivations behind scholarship itself, it also offers questions about its terms and practices. What is the nature of our emotional investment in—our desire for—the past? What are our objects of study? How do our present-day cultural assumptions and biases, particularly in the areas of sexuality and gender, continue to determine what we will study and what conclusions we will draw? What materials and methods have been excluded as a result not only of sidelining the passions but also of understanding scholarly passion with reference only to dominant, masculinist, heteronormative ideologies of knowledge and power? What, finally, explains the fascination of the dead lover? And of some dead lovers over others?

The Best Lover

David M. Halperin

For Eddie Cline, Tom Brennan, Brian Moran

THERE'S NO LOVER LIKE A DEAD LOVER.

Consider a curious book, published recently in France, called *La Sacque amoureuse* ("Love's Wringer" or "Love's Third Degree"). The author is identified as "Claire C.," a doctor who died in August 1999. *La Sacque amoureuse* purports to be an open letter by Claire C. to her husband of thirty years, written *after* her death, in which she reveals the hidden dimensions of their love. "In the course of the story," says the summary on the back cover, "it emerges that she never was the person he thought he loved, by whom he thought himself beloved, but merely a phantom who, in death, has acceded to her real life."¹

It is, when you think about it, an astonishing claim. The life Claire C. lived for thirty years with her book's nameless addressee was not real—not, at least, compared to the existence she has embarked on since her death. Her husband never knew the living woman; only in death has she revealed her true face to him. It is also in death that she has finally taken complete possession of her husband, dominating his thoughts, haunting his nightmares, impeding his pleasures. Clearly, Eurydice is dead and well and writing in Paris.

Eurydice never was the slightest use to anyone when she was alive. No poet, writer, or composer has ever succeeded in making the living Eurydice interesting. The entire point of her existence is to furnish Orpheus with an occasion for song—to provide him with his most powerful inspiration, the source of a supreme masterpiece, a work of art stronger than death. But only the dead Eurydice can do that. Orpheus's mistake is to resuscitate her; the revived Eurydice, querulous and uncomprehending, is nobody's idea of a good time. Fortunately for everyone, she doesn't last long.

By the start of the twentieth century, Orpheus had learned his lesson. Reborn as Paul, the hero of E. W. Korngold's 1920 opera *Die Tote Stadt* (based

on Georges Rodenbach's 1892 novel *Bruges-la-Morte*), he is obsessed with a young dancer who is passing through town in the company of a troupe of actors and who uncannily resembles his dead wife. After the dancer pays him a visit and sings one of the most ravishing airs in all of vocal music, Paul falls into a trance, which lasts for most of the opera. In that vision, he sees his dead lover return to life, reincarnated in the enchanting young woman but transformed into a cruel and vicious whore, who mocks his fidelity to his dead wife's memory, betrays him with every stranger, and forces him to murder his best friend. In the end, he strangles her. He awakens from that nightmare to a knock on the door. The young woman has come back for her umbrella, which she forgot; meekly, but with unmistakable intent, she wonders whether her lapse did not express a wish to return (*man sollt es für ein Omen nehmen—ein Wink, als ob ich bleiben sollte*). But our hero has been cured of his longing to have Eurydice back, and he remains unmoved by her insinuation; she shrugs, turns, and goes out. What man would want a live lover when he can have a dead one?

I say "man" because I am struck by the consistency with which canonical expressions of male eroticism in Western literature privilege dead lovers—male or female—over living ones. The best lover, in this tradition, is a dead lover. Men's characteristic preference for dead lovers of either sex is not frankly acknowledged; it is never proclaimed in advance. On the contrary, the death of his lover is the last thing the male romantic thinks he wants. But there turns out to be a logic at work in love that exceeds what the individual man in love intends. In ways I will explain in a moment, the death of the lover does not frustrate male erotic desire. Nor, of course, does it fulfill desire. But it does, to a remarkable degree, complete it.

The superiority of the dead lover is not a conscious projection but a retrospective conclusion, which the desiring male subject arrives at belatedly, after the death of his lover. To be sure, he may have an occasional intuition, even while his lover is alive, that, for the purposes of his love, the lover would be better off dead, but in most cases the death of his lover is what he fears, not what he desires. The full truth dawns on him only after the fact.² If Claire C. does not accede to her real life until after her death, that eventuality is not something her husband could have anticipated while she was alive. He did not know he was living with a phantom: it took her death to reveal that to him.

The gap between those prospective and retrospective perceptions, between the conscious intentions of the male subject and the objective structure of his desire, gives rise to a necessary irony. The best lover is not the lover that

the amorous man thought he desired: the lover he thought he desired turns out to be less desirable than the one thing he thought he never desired, namely, the disappearance of his lover. The content of desire does not provide access to the structure or the nature of desire, nor can it disclose the goal of desire. The experience of love does not contain the truth of love. That is what makes love ineluctably ironic.³

The irony in love is situational, or structural, but it cannot be articulated without also becoming rhetorical. To speak proleptically of the dead lover as the best lover, to collapse the distance between the consciousness of the male subject and the objective structure of his desire, to love the living lover as already dead is to make the irony in love explicit at the level of articulation, to translate the irony in love from a logical register to a rhetorical one. If the remarks that follow seem saturated with irony, that is not because I wish to be facetious, or cynical: rather, it is because I have decided to embrace the rhetorical effect that the voicing of love's irony produces. The peculiar tone of this little essay is more than an idiosyncratic mannerism, then—more than an unpleasant or tasteless tic of style and more than the expression of a personal disaffection or disenchantment. It is the result of making conscious and explicit—and of integrating into the lover's discourse—one of the many ironies built into the experience of erotic desire itself.

Lovers, so long as they are alive, are always at risk of becoming an embarrassment. Real bodies get in the way of desire. Bodies, of course, evoke desire—but only because they are the medium through which the male subject encounters the stirring, dazzling, riveting, transporting qualities that arouse his desire. As Plato discovered long ago, those qualities are not identical to, and should never be confused with, the actual living, breathing, transpiring, fleshly body in which they manifest themselves. But since these desirable features do manifest themselves in bodies, they are accessible to the male subject in the first instance only through the body of his lover. The lover's body, then, is at once vehicle and obstacle: it both offers and withholds what the male subject desires—materializing it, giving it an immediate, concrete form and a local habitation but also interposing the body's brute materiality between the subject and the object of his desire.

Hence the increasing resentment that the beloved's body generates in the Western erotic tradition. Plato is less aggrieved than contemptuous: in the *Symposium*, Diotima casually devalues the sort of beauty that is “full of human flesh and color and many other sorts of mortal trash” (211e), encrusted with the

“shell and weed and rock” of material contingency, as Socrates puts it in the *Republic* (611d). In the latter dialogue, Socrates implies that the lover who takes for his object a living, human body actually pursues a wraith: he is an idolater, whose longing is directed at a phantom such as the gods sent to Troy in place of Helen (according to some versions of the myth) to be an empty focus of heroic strife (586bc). The Helen for whom countless Greeks and Trojans died, in other words, was no more real than was the living Claire C. to her husband in *La Sacque amoureuse*.

Plato, to be sure, never has much good to say on behalf of the body. But even Milton, our great champion of embodied human love, registers distinct frustration at the limits imposed on love's expression by the materiality of the human body itself: an unmistakable wistfulness can be heard in the Archangel Raphael's boast to Adam in *Paradise Lost* that angels enjoy sexual pleasure “in eminence,” inasmuch as their intercourse is “Easier than Air with Air”: “Total they mix, Union of Pure with Pure Desiring.” Unlike human beings, they “obstacle find none Of membrane, joint, or limb, exclusive bars” (8.622–29).

And as if those pesky membranes weren't bad enough, there is the further difficulty that it is impossible both to embrace your lover and to look at her at the same time. The very arrangement of the human organs confronts you with an unhappy choice between the visual excitement of contemplating your lover's beauty and the sensual pleasure of fucking her. That is precisely why it is fortunate that men are endowed with memory and can remember what their lovers look like, as Kierkegaard's Aesthete observes in “The Diary of a Seducer,” in the first half of *Either/Or*. Otherwise, an amorous man “would always desire to be at a distance from beauty, not so close that the physical eye cannot see how beautiful that is which he holds in his embrace and which this eye has lost. To be sure, he can regain it for the outward sight by putting it at a distance from himself, but he may also keep it before the soul's eye when he cannot see the object because it is too close to him, when lips are pressed upon lips.”⁴

Proust, however, is not content to combine present physical sensation with recollected mental representation. Marcel's account of kissing Albertine for the first time methodically surveys the sensual compromises that make that experience turn out to be extravagantly anticlimactic.

Man . . . lacks a certain number of essential organs, and most particularly he possesses none adapted for kissing. For this absent organ he substitutes his lips, and thereby arrives perhaps at a

slightly more satisfying result than if he were reduced to caressing his beloved with a horny tusk. But the lips, designed to convey to the palate the taste of whatever tempts them, must resign themselves, without understanding their mistake or admitting their disappointment, to roaming over the surface and coming up against the barrier of the desired but impenetrable cheek. Moreover, at that moment of actual contact with the flesh, the lips . . . cannot taste the flavor which nature prevents them from discerning, for in that desolate zone in which they are unable to find their proper nourishment they are alone, the sense of sight, then that of smell, having long since deserted them. At first, as my mouth began gradually to approach the cheeks which my eyes had recommended it to kiss, my eyes, changing their position, saw a different pair of cheeks. . . . During the short trip of my lips towards her cheek, it was ten Albertines that I saw; this one girl being like a many-headed goddess, the head I had seen last, if I tried to approach it, would give way to another. At least so long as I had not touched that head, I could still see it, and a faint perfume came to me from it. But alas—for in this matter of kissing our nostrils and eyes are as ill-placed as our lips are ill-made—suddenly my eyes ceased to see, then my nose, crushed by the collision, no longer perceived any odor, and, without thereby getting any closer to the goal of my desire, I discovered, from these hateful signs (*ces détestables signes*), that I was at last in the process of kissing the cheek of Albertine.⁵

How, then, not to resent the beloved's body, which comes so inconveniently between the lover and his object? The horrific and pointless ransacking of the body in search of the qualities that make it erotically desirable in the first place is the theme of many of Dennis Cooper's novels. In *Frisk*, one boy describes what it is like to be the object of such an erotic assault: "To have an older man so completely, insanely worked up over me, like if I was where someone had buried some sort of treasure or antidote to something malignant in him."⁶ Nothing for it but to cut a pretty boy to pieces.

It is perverse of Heathcliff to insist on robbing Cathy's grave. No one but such a literal-minded, anti-Platonic brute could fail to realize the great advantage of a dead lover: her body, now that it is gone, no longer poses an obstacle to possessing her. Just ask Shelley, the author of *Adonais*; just ask Tennyson, the

author of *In Memoriam*. Isabel Archer's mistake consists not in refusing Lord Warburton but in passing up Ralph Touchet: dying young, he would have assured her independence for life and in more than merely monetary ways.

Most lovers, of course, are not dead enough. Which is why their partners so often have to take matters into their own hands. Shakespeare's Othello articulates with terrifying and exemplary clarity the masculine rationale implicit in countless mute statistics: he says to Desdemona, "I will kill thee, And love thee after" (5.2.18–19). Othello is exceptional, admittedly, though he merely makes brutally explicit the logic that pervades the entire European tradition of masculine erotics. If he stands out, it is only because most lovers are not such do-it-yourselfers: they wait for an act of God to do the job for them.

Nor does God keep the blessed waiting for long. "Thou wast hot on the heels of thy fugitives, at once god of reprisals and fountain of mercies," exclaims Saint Augustine in book 4 of his *Confessions* (4.4.7). The occasion for his gratitude is the providential termination of his passionate friendship with a nameless boy of his own age, a fellow Manichaean heretic, who got sick, was baptized while unconscious, renounced Manichaeism and returned to Christianity, resisted Augustine's efforts to talk him out of it, and died when their friendship, "sweeter to me above and beyond all the sweetnesses of my life at that time," had barely lasted an entire year (4.4.7). Augustine was devastated: he saw death everywhere he looked. Reflecting many years later on his refusal to love human beings as if they were human, as if they were not destined to die, he likens our erotic fixation on individuals to a nonsensical attachment to the syllables in human speech. When someone is speaking to us, he says, we don't want to prolong the existence of particular syllables; rather, we want the syllables to fly past (*transvolare*) so that others will come and take their place, and we will hear the whole sentence (4.11.17). Augustine doesn't spell out the erotic corollary to this structuralist fable (for that, we must look to Proust and later to Derrida's *Politiques de l'amitié*), but its implication for his model of how to love mortal objects as mortal is, chillingly, clear enough. It emerges more tellingly from a later text of his, book 8 of *On the Trinity*, by which time Augustine had found the perfect boyfriend in Saint Paul, a lover who is not only dead but who died long before Augustine was born. What Augustine prizes, now, is the love with which he loves the goodness of Paul, which makes the practice of love something you can do all by yourself or at least outside the presence of another living person. Augustine thereby bequeaths to later Christian mystics

an instructive and imposing example of how to love the greatest of all dead lovers, Jesus Christ.

Nowadays, in our secular world, HIV/AIDS has done a lot to make up for the absence of divine grace of the Augustinian sort, with its distinctive blend of providential mercy and homicidal vengeance. A great many of the most eloquent artistic responses to the pandemic testify to the erotic power exercised by lovers from beyond the grave. Consider two Canadian films from the same period: Laurie Lynd's 1991 short film *RSVP* and John Greyson's 1993 full-length musical *Zero Patience*. In *RSVP* a young man returns home from his lover's funeral to discover that, before his death, the lover had telephoned "RSVP," a call-in radio program, to request a broadcast of Jessye Norman singing "Le Spectre de la rose," a song from Berlioz's 1840–41 orchestral cycle *Les Nuits d'été*: he had been planning to hear Norman sing it live but had evidently been too sick to attend the concert. His surviving partner and, it turns out, a number of his family and friends, as well as many others, hear the posthumous broadcast; its effect is to reconcile them to one another and to ease the tensions among them that had emerged at the funeral. The dead lover's chosen vehicle for his RSVP, for his reply to his nearest and dearest from beyond the grave, is particularly apt because Berlioz's song is a setting of a poem by Théophile Gautier in which the ghost of a dead rose returns from paradise to haunt the bedside of a sleeping girl who had worn it the previous night at a ball and on whose "alabaster" breast it had deliciously expired.⁷ In the context of the story, therefore, the use of the Gautier poem occasions multiple ironies.⁸ By contrast, *Zero Patience* centers on a volatile affair between two dead lovers: Patient Zero—the notorious Canadian flight attendant, Gaetan Dugas, dubiously identified by the late *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter Randy Shilts as likely to have been responsible for bringing HIV to North America—and Sir Richard Burton, the Victorian explorer, translator, and author of a famous ethnographic essay on the varieties of pederasty that flourish, supposedly, in the hot zones of our planet. Greyson's musical brings its two protagonists back to life in order to contest contemporary homophobic constructions of the epidemic as well as the institutional politics that ground those constructions in a spurious realism—in specious deployments of scientific, historical, anthropological, and journalistic fact.⁹

Despite HIV/AIDS, however, lovers don't die as punctually as they ought to do. Luckily, they regularly do the next best thing and fall asleep. Whether it is David Copperfield gazing rapturously at the sleeping (and doomed) Steerforth,

“where he lay in the moonlight, with his handsome face turned up, and his head reclining easily on his arm,”¹⁰ or Marcel measuring with obsessive tenderness the breathing of the sleeping Albertine and consummating his desire for her in her sleep, European literature is replete with scenes of erotic rhapsody over the immobile and unconscious bodies of sleeping lovers—from the ancient Greek myth of Endymion to Pedro Almodóvar’s 2002 film *Hable con ella*.

It is the sight of the sleeping Desdemona that stops Othello in his tracks and elicits from him his most lyrical and erotically intense appreciation of her physical beauty. “Yet I’ll not shed her blood,” he says, “Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow And smooth as monumental alabaster” (5.2.3–5). Only the sleeping figure of his wife prompts him to dwell with such sensual detail on the fleshly particularities of her body and to treat her undoubted sexual appeal with such hyperbolic rhetorical amplification. Nor does Othello limit himself to looking at her. He allows himself to take physical pleasure from the body of the sleeping Desdemona in ways that he no longer seeks from Desdemona awake or dead: “When I have plucked the rose,” he muses, “I cannot give it vital growth again. It needs must wither. I’ll smell it on the tree” (5.2.13–15). Whereupon, according to the stage directions in the Second Quarto, he “Kisses her” until, fatally, “She wakes,” as he at length observes (5.2.22).

Indeed, it is always a mistake in such circumstances to wake up. Edna St. Vincent Millay knew what she was talking about when she exclaimed, in the opening lines of her final sonnet in *Fatal Interview* (1931), “Oh, sleep forever in the Latmian cave, Mortal Endymion, darling of the moon!” Lovers are lovable in silent repose. When, in the third poem of his first book of elegies, Propertius comes home drunk from a party to find his mistress Cynthia asleep, he overflows with tenderness for her and makes love to her as she drowns. But at length his fumbling attentions wake her up, and she rewards him with an indignant and undoubtedly well-deserved reproach for his faithlessness. This scene turns out to be a mere dress rehearsal for Cynthia’s most memorable complaint to Propertius, the one she will deliver from beyond the grave in *Sunt aliquid manes* (4.7), when she returns from the dead in a dream to remind her former lover, who has since reformed and turned himself into a patriotic Roman poet, that she still can exercise an imperious claim on him.

Like Cynthia, Albertine is most lovable when asleep. “Her sleep actualized to a certain degree the possibility of love. Alone, I could think of her, but I missed her, I did not possess her. When she was present, I spoke to her, but was too absent from myself to be able to think of her. When she was asleep,

I no longer had to talk, I knew that I was no longer seen by her, I no longer needed to live on the surface of myself. By shutting her eyes, by losing consciousness, Albertine had stripped off, one after another, the different human personalities with which she had deceived me ever since the day when I had first made her acquaintance. She was animated now only by the unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, and more strange, yet one that belonged to me more. . . . I had the impression of possessing her entirely which I never had when she was awake. . . . I felt at such moments [after having sex with her sleeping body] that I had possessed her more completely, like an unconscious and unresisting object of dumb nature."¹¹ Proust expands on this topic for pages: it is, in some respects, the most sustained erotic meditation on Albertine in the entire narrative of the *Recherche*.

It is not only Othello, Propertius, and Marcel who are sexually aroused by their sleeping lovers and who try to make love to them without waking them up. If Humbert Humbert had only succeeded in sedating Lolita to the point of oblivion, as he had intended to do, he could have assuaged his criminal desires for her without having to enter into an erotic relationship with Lolita as a person—and without transforming his bucolic American dream into an endless waking nightmare. For Lolita, the consequences of waking up are lethal, as they also are, sooner or later, for Albertine, Cynthia, and Desdemona. And Steerforth, too, for that matter.

What accounts for this consistent male preference for a dead or sleeping lover, whether male or female, over a living one? A number of answers spring to mind. We might say, with feminists, that men have become addicted to power and privilege and an untrammelled autonomy that erotic dependency on another living person puts at risk: they find it easier to love without the interference of another will, another subjectivity, another person. We might say, with psychoanalysts and social psychologists, in only slightly altered language, that men develop an armored psyche, which is threatened by any hint of internal weakness, need, desire, or vulnerability of the sort inevitably entailed by a dynamic relationship with a live and autonomous human being. We might say, with Platonists (and their poor relations, the Lacanians), that the object of desire is always already lost to the desiring subject, is always already out of reach and impossible to possess, and that the only thing to do with it is to transcend it or sublimate it or fetishize a substitute for it.¹² Or we might say, with the Romantics, that love is larger than lover, beloved, and the society or world

that grounds their relation; its fulfillment can only be achieved at the cost of universal annihilation.

Without exactly challenging any of those accounts, all of which I find compelling in different ways, I would like to propose an alternate approach—or, perhaps, merely an alternate description. What men value in sleeping, dying, or dead lovers is their turning aside from the subjects who desire them: it is their withdrawal into a world of their own or at least their retirement to an inaccessible remove. The reason men prize their lovers' fading from them into something approaching objectivity is that it restores to those lovers their otherness, their distance and strangeness and radical unavailability, which is what had lent them their erotic appeal in the first place. This is of course a long argument, and it has been much better made by others, such as René Girard, especially in his superb commentary on Freud's 1911 essay "On Narcissism" in *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde* (a truly unfashionable book nowadays, but one that contains insights I continue to value).¹³ In turning away from us, the dead lover enacts the ruses of erotic desire itself, mimicking the characteristic unfindability of the erotic object, its simultaneous immanence in and transcendence of its material medium, its tendency to recede from the lover in his every attempt to possess it.

That is precisely what appeals to Jean Genet about criminals: on virtually the first page of *Journal du voleur*, we read that criminals, "as in love, withdraw from you, take their distance, and put me at a distance from the world and its laws."¹⁴ Rilke's Nietzschean injunction, in the twelfth sonnet of the second series of his *Sonnets to Orpheus*, to will, if not our lovers' death, then their inevitable transformation, would almost seem in the light of the literary evidence to be superfluous. *Wolle die Wandlung*, Rilke famously begins; *O sei für die Flamme begeistert, / drin sich ein Ding dir entzieht, das mit Verwandlungen prunkt* (Wish for [or "Will your"] transformation. Be eager for the flame into which each thing withdraws from you as it decks itself out in its changes). Far from needing to be told to take pleasure in the withdrawal into otherness of the things we know and love, the male subject of erotic desire is already all too eager to do exactly that. Nothing produces *longing* like *distance*.

Even when Steerforth was awake, not to say alive, what endeared him to David Copperfield was "the dashing way he had of treating me like a plaything," acting as if David didn't exist at all for Steerforth as a person of equal merit—a manner that David found "more agreeable to me than any behaviour he could have adopted."¹⁵ Similarly, Proust tells us that the moments that were most

useful to Odette in her seduction of Swann, that “did more to bind him to her than all her coquetry,” were the moments “in which she forgot Swann’s very existence.”¹⁶ One of Rilke’s most loving recent commentators, Robert Hass, in a persona poem of his own called “Santa Lucia,” is explicit about the erotic appeal of being ignored. “What I want,” he writes,

happens
not when the deer freezes in the shade
and looks at you and you hold very still
and meet her gaze but in the moment after
when she flicks her ears & starts to feed again.¹⁷

This erotic dynamic is played out on an expansive scale in Bill Sherwood’s 1986 film *Parting Glances*, which depicts twenty-four hours of erotic rivalry in the lives of three gay men. Michael’s ex-lover Nick has AIDS and is slowly dying; Michael’s current lover Robert, the very picture of health, has no way of competing with the emotional grip on Michael that Nick exercises through his agonizing, inexorable withdrawal from him. So Robert has arranged to have himself transferred from New York to somewhere in Africa for a year or two in the hope that, by disappearing before Nick does, he will retain a superior hold on Michael’s fascination. The comings and goings of the three main characters and assorted minor ones neatly alternate and balance one another, as each attempts, by leaving, and by glancing backward as he leaves, to become irresistible and to supplant the others—to become, in effect, both Orpheus and Eurydice at once.

Little wonder, then, if, according to the legend, Achilles fell in love with Pen-thesia in the very moment of killing her. Greek vase painters never tired of depicting the supreme moment when, as the two bodies came together over Achilles’s spear, their eyes met for the first *and* last time, each of them dazzled by the spectacular and rapidly fading vision of the other’s beauty. It was, as Robert Mapplethorpe might have called it, a perfect moment, and it continues to find echoes in the work of Genet and Mishima. The entire subsequent history of occidental erotics has been downhill from there.

In short, there really is no lover like a dead lover.

Perhaps, in that sense, there’s hope for all of us.

NOTES

1. "Au fil du récit, on devine qu'elle n'a jamais été celle qu'il croyait aimer, dont il se croyait aimé, mais seulement une apparition qui, dans la mort, accède à sa vraie vie." See, now, the fine appreciation of the book by Philippe Forest, who reviewed it in *Art Press* (2003).

2. Similarly, Colin Burrow (2003, 3) speaks of "a man whose love was most alive when it had lost its object."

3. I have made an earlier stab at exploring this theme (see Halperin 2005). I have reused some material from that earlier essay in what follows here.

4. Kierkegaard 1966, 15–16.

5. I have freely adapted the standard translation: Proust 1981, 2:377–79. The original passage, from *Le Côté de Guermantes II, ii*, can be found in the four-volume (1987–89) *Pléiade* edition at 2:659–61.

6. Cooper 1991, 87. For an excellent discussion of this passage and of Cooper's writing about desire and the body more generally, see Jackson 1994, recapitulated in Jackson 1995, 184–202.

7. The relevant portion of the text reads:

Mon destin fut digne d'envie,
Pour avoir un sort si beau
Plus d'un aurait donné sa vie;
Car j'ai ta gorge pour tombeau,
Et sur l'albâtre où je repose
Un poète avec un baiser
Écrivit «Ci-gît une rose,
Que tous les rois vont jalouser.»

8. See the wonderful analysis by Chambers (1998), along with its anticipations in Chambers 1996 and Chambers 1997.

9. See Shilts 1987, esp. 21–23, 84, 130, 147, 165, 198, 200, 251–52, 438–39; and Burton 1886, 10:205–54.

10. Dickens [1849–50] 1966, 140. Steerforth's posture, constantly recalled throughout the novel, endlessly rehearses and anticipates the posture of his corpse as David ultimately views it: "I saw him lying with his head upon his arm, as I had often seen him lie at school" (866).

11. Proust 1981, 3:64, 67 (*Pléiade* ed., 3:578, 581). Once again, I have altered, though only slightly this time, the published translation.

12. For a sophisticated Lacanian approach to the topic, an approach that continues, explicitly and directly, the line of inquiry begun here, see Allouch 2003–4. This entire issue of *L'Unebvue*, in fact, is dedicated to the topic of dead lovers. It is fittingly entitled *Psychanalystes sous la pluie de feu* (Psychoanalysts beneath the Rain of Fire), an allusion to the divine punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah—and, more immediately, to Dante's reuse of that biblical image in Cantos 15 and 16 of the *Inferno*, where death, love, literature, politics, paternity, pederasty, and pedagogy all mingle and fuse.

13. Girard 1987, 352–92. The French original was first published in 1978.
14. Genet [1949] 2001, 10: “comme dans l’amour ils s’écartent et m’écartent du monde et de ses lois.” I have expanded Genet’s formulation for the sake of emphasis (cf. Genet 1964, 10: criminals, “as in love, turn away and turn me away from the world and its laws.”). The English translation, incidentally, is based on the original, unexpurgated edition of Genet’s text, which has long been unavailable in France.
15. Dickens [1849–50] 1966, 358; also 146: “the being cherished as a kind of plaything [by Steerforth] . . . stimulated me to exertion.”
16. Proust 1981, 1:322 (*Pléiade* ed., 1:290).
17. Hass 1979, 24. See, also “Looking for Rilke,” Hass’s lengthy introduction to Stephen Mitchell’s translation of Rilke (1982, xi–xliv), an anthology that, however, does not include *Sonnet to Orpheus* 2.12.

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Propertius and the Blindness of Affect

Basil Dufallo

IF THERE'S ONE THING that a dead lover in a work of literary or visual art affords us, it is an apparently natural place to begin. A lover is dead. Do we understand the nature of the erotic bond broken by death or don't we? We may wish to identify with it, somehow share in it, and find in its severing a moving expression of the exigencies of the human condition. Or we may seek to demystify it, to reinterpret it, to discover in the artist's emphasis on love in the face of death his or her own passionate commentary on the aesthetic possibilities of art itself: on art's capacity, that is, to immortalize and preserve the object of love in the face of destruction. The way that the artistic subject matter of a dead lover, in other words, puts personal affect front and center, can have a powerfully determining effect on the range of our scholarly responses to the work of art in question. Discussion of a topic such as this one can foster a desire to open a window onto the personal affective life of the past, and such a strategy perhaps becomes all the more enticing to us when we are dealing with the very distant past of the premodern period.

But this technique, this recourse to the seemingly natural response, has its drawbacks in preventing us from understanding the full import of death and erotic bonds as they are represented within the premodern societies that we study. In this essay I hope to justify this hypothesis by considering two of the more significant kinds of scholarly response to the topic (at least in my own field of classics) in its literal form, that is, to the representation of dead lovers in literature. These I will call the "biographic" and the "intertextual aesthetic." I will argue first that, although they appear to be different and even opposed to one another, they may both be versions of the seemingly natural attempt to illuminate the personal affective life of the past. Even recent efforts, furthermore, to reconcile and move beyond this dichotomy may be grounded in its shared assumption about such literary representations as fulfilling this function. While

they can be illuminating, I maintain, such readings may also blind us to the collective concerns of the society in which the literary artist works, concerns from whose reconstruction we may derive compelling explanations for the very features of the literary work so often ascribed to the individual psychological and emotional life of the artist himself. The representation of erotic bonds linking past and present can be a way of attempting to bridge not only personal loss but also cultural and political change and rupture. And this may apply not only to the authors who are the objects of our study but also to us as scholars engaged in fashioning our own representations of the primary material. Moving thus, I propose, from the personal to the collective in our interpretations of the ancient fascination with dead lovers is perhaps among the most significant challenges with which we are faced by the collaborative effort of a volume such as this one.

I'll concentrate on the scholarly history of one of the most famous poems about a dead lover in the ancient Greco-Roman corpus, the seventh *Elegy* of Propertius's fourth book of elegies, Propertius 4.7.¹ The poem recounts the visitation to a sleeping Propertius (for so the narrator of the poem identifies himself) of the ghost of his dead lover, Cynthia. The introductory section is devoted to a description of the ghost, as, we are told, she appeared to Propertius in a dream shortly after her funeral. The remainder consists of the ghost's monologue, in which, with her words assuming the tone of a legal speech in a Roman court of law (which will be treated later), she takes Propertius to task for having neglected her and profited from her fame. She recalls the couple's many nights of lovemaking at the crossroads and goes on to upbraid Propertius for his absence from her funeral. She then accuses his slaves of poisoning her and, after insisting that she has not come to persecute Propertius himself, swears that she was always faithful, an assertion she backs up by comparing herself, favorably, to mythological heroines with whom she shares her dwelling place in the underworld. The ghost goes on to complain directly of the influence of Propertius's new lover, Chloris, and demands a more prominent grave marker, one that will restore to her the "praise" that Propertius, in writing about her, has appropriated for himself. In concluding, she predicts that death will reconnect the two lovers in a perpetual, if ambiguous, embrace, as they "grind bone on bone" in the grave. And yet the ghost flees the embrace in which Propertius, as he wakes, attempts to enfold it.

Without claiming to be exempt, myself, from some affective relationship with this remarkable poem, I wish to call attention to the fact that scholars

have focused almost exclusively on what the dead Cynthia might have meant to Propertius himself—the actual poet, that is, as (usually) identified with the poem’s narrator—so as to make this relationship the model for what she should mean to us. They have, in a sense, sought to imitate Propertius in conjuring up their own dead Cynthias so as to place this figure at the center of their interpretations. And in this way personal affect, the personal passion of an ancient poet, whether for his lover or for his poetry, becomes in each case the problem to be solved. In the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth, Propertius’s lingering passion for a real dead lover was seen as the genesis of the poem, and a “love affair” with some girl was assumed to be the impetus for much of his poetry. In the later twentieth century, readings of the poem came to converge upon the idea of Propertius’s evocation of the ghost of Cynthia as an expression of his devotion to his poetry: to the genre of erotic love elegy that “Cynthia” embodies (and that Propertius was supposedly discouraged from pursuing by a moralistic Augustus) and to the particular aesthetic, focused on the commingling of love and death, that Propertius borrowed from the Greek poets of the Hellenistic period. In both instances, intensive scrutiny of the figure of Cynthia becomes the basis for a response to the poem as a whole.

I’ll look first, rather rapidly, at two influential examples of each of these approaches, before turning to a more recent attempt to reconcile the critical stances they represent. I’ll then set out the evidence for collective concerns of Propertius’s elite Roman audience as a motivation for the rhetorical form of Propertius’s poem—its technique of “calling up the dead”—which, as we shall see, reproduces a central trope of Roman republican oratory illustrated for us by Cicero’s speech *Pro Caelio*.² The ideology of the Augustan Principate, as expressed in both textual and material artifacts, provides a basis for reconstructing such concerns of an elite collective. The simultaneous fascination of Augustus and his subjects with traditional forms of ancestral display and the perceived need to revise such techniques so as to rein in intense social and political competition between aristocratic clans and their factions offers a compelling framework within which to situate Propertius’s revision of an oratorical trope in erotic elegy. Thus Propertius’s poem supplies us, as scholars, with the elements of a critique of our own practice, insofar as its intense focus on lost erotic love masks a different sort of desire for the past, one comparable to that in which we, too, participate as we attempt to create an affective bond between Propertius’s world and our own.

For Propertius scholars of the nineteenth century, appreciating him as a poet meant appreciating the physical attributes of his lover, Cynthia, so as to

identify with his attraction to her. It is worth revisiting such tactics not so as to indulge in statements of the obvious or in facile self-congratulation but as a reminder of how strong a cue such scholarly rhetoric takes from the rhetorical form of its purported object of study.³ Consider the style of biographic criticism (a style central to the whole discourse of literary appreciation in the nineteenth-century academy and its related culture)⁴ engaged in by J. P. Postgate in the introduction to his *Select Elegies of Propertius*. After expressing some hesitation over the question of Propertius 4.7's relationship to the details of Propertius's personal life, Postgate concludes nevertheless that the poem is "an expression of contrition and an earnest of reparation" following Propertius's failure, "in the prostration of his grief," to have "superintended the execution of his instructions for the funeral" and his having permitted "a certain Chloris, otherwise unknown, to usurp an unauthorised authority over the household."⁵ For Postgate, Propertius's true feelings for Cynthia come out in his poetic evocation of her ghost. In spite of the couple's many difficulties, of which a series of other moments, Postgate presumes, in Propertius's poetry provides an accurate account, Cynthia's actual death brings forth a renewed flood of emotion, of which Propertius 4.7 is the record.

Postgate's reasons for following this interpretive path become clear as soon as we encounter his attitude toward Propertius's love itself. It is the origin, he claims, of Propertius's genius. Specifically, it is the case that "[w]ithout the stimulus of his love and without the sympathy and encouragement of his beloved" Propertius's genius "might never have broken the crust of lethargy which covered it!"⁶ Postgate's Propertius is hampered by lassitude and an unstable character, but such elevation of Propertius's love for Cynthia is especially important to Postgate because he is drawn to the conclusion, shared by Propertian scholarship in general, that the figure of Cynthia is that of a *meretrix*, a high-class prostitute. Postgate responds to this problem by asserting, characteristically, that, "although she was a *meretrix*," Cynthia "was not an ordinary one,"⁷ and in what follows creates an alluring image of Cynthia as proof. Here, in a passage of particular interest to readers of Propertius 4.7, Postgate, collecting together disparate elements from Propertius's work, himself conjures up the Cynthia that he chooses to remember.

She was tall, stately, and well proportioned, with long tapering hands, a clear red and white complexion, dark brown hair and brilliant black eyes. Her eyes especially and her graceful movements are

the theme of the poet's perpetual admiration. To these she added other attractions. She was a skillful player and an accomplished dancer and an adept in the processes of the loom.⁸

The portrait is memorable in itself but, still more strikingly, reads almost as a riposte to the chilling image of the dead Cynthia in Propertius 4.7. Postgate's living Cynthia, a composite image, responds, as it were, to Propertius's ghostly one. The emphases, we note, of the two descriptions are virtually the same: on hands, face, hair, and eyes. The skeletal snap of the fingers with which Cynthia's ghost prefaces her monologue in Propertius's poem (11–12) seems recalled by Postgate's emphasis on Cynthia's manual dexterity as a musician and spinner of wool, while wool spinning itself carries connotations of conjugal fidelity like those to which Cynthia lays claim later in the poem. Postgate wants his Cynthia to survive the ravages of time, and so evokes her, conjures her up, in order that, through scrutiny of her image, he can render Propertius's passion for her, if not entirely licit, at least thoroughly comprehensible.⁹

It may seem easy to write off the biographism of a Postgate as a chapter in the history of scholarship that is now long past. But perhaps it is not so easy once we realize that the assumptions and goals of the scholarly trend that, in Propertian criticism, follows and even opposes itself directly to this earlier approach bear similarities to those of nineteenth-century biographism itself. Within this subsequent trend, the intertextual aesthetic, the effort is no longer to understand Propertius 4.7 as primarily about the poet's fascination with some real girl, but with the aesthetic realm, specifically with poetry, the poetic tradition, and its power. A general and continued interest in the literary sophistication of the Augustan poets accounts for the shift in emphasis. In the case of Propertius 4.7, the approach takes its fundamental impetus from the insight that Propertius bases his dream vision in part on the visitation of Patroclus's ghost to the sleeping Achilles in Homer's *Iliad* (23.59–92). Intense efforts follow to decipher the literary allusiveness and (considerable) variations of literary tone the poem presents.¹⁰

But again, even as scholars scrutinize the poem's allusiveness and other formal qualities, they do in fact continue to use the figure of Cynthia to seek a strong, informing, and self-justifying link to the affective life of Propertius. Such is true in particular of what is perhaps the most fully articulated example of the intertextual aesthetic approach in the poem's critical history, that of Theodore Papanghelis in his 1987 monograph *Propertius: A Hellenistic Poet on Love*

and *Death*. Papangelis's deep awareness of Propertius's debt to the Hellenistic Greek fascination with the themes of love, death, and their commingling leads him to emphasize Propertius's overwhelming attachment to this aesthetic as the driving force behind his artistry. In Papangelis's words, "Propertius brings a sensuous temperament to bear on the themes of love and death"; these are "a fascinating obsession."¹¹ A Hellenistic poem such as Bion's *Lament for Adonis* holds "Propertius' imaginative sensibility spellbound," the theme of death affords Propertius "an erotic triumph," and Propertius "exults" in "consummation through death."¹² If we hear passion vibrating in Papangelis's rhetoric, it is because he makes the very exciting claim to have uncovered a different obsession in his poet from the erotic bond long posited as the genesis of Propertian love poetry.

Thus, when he turns to *Elegy* 4.7, Papangelis, like Postgate, has a compelling reason to imitate Propertius in evoking for us a particular version of the dead Cynthia so as to illustrate Propertius's devotion to this aesthetic. "Over the elegy," Papangelis remarks, "presides the spectre of Cynthia. Being the visual 'embodiment' as well as the exponent of the poem's aesthetics, her figure must be scrupulously scanned."¹³ Following this statement of his critical intentions, Papangelis elaborates a close reading harking back strongly to the techniques of New Criticism, so as to call attention to "those points of diction, sound, rhythm, motif-handling and literary background which seem . . . to invite the reader of the poem . . . towards a more aesthetic response"; this will help him reveal that 4.7 "can be seen as the most consummate and wide-ranging expression" of Propertius's aestheticizing principles.¹⁴ Papangelis's assessment of the whole poem encapsulates his view of the profound importance of its aesthetic to Propertius: "'Hymne à la beauté' would perhaps give a better suggestion of its bias than 'La mort des amants.'"¹⁵ For Papangelis, the details of Cynthia's ghostly person lead us to Propertius's own sensuousness.

It is useful to observe at this point that the eagerness of a Postgate to embrace the biographic fiction in the case of Propertius 4.7, and the equal zeal of a Papangelis to find another avenue into its author's affective life once the inadequacy of the earlier approach had been exposed, point in fact to an essential feature of the poem—one that continues to preoccupy its most recent critics. The barriers that Propertius 4.7 sets before us as we seek its author's intentions or passions would appear considerable, even, perhaps, for an age grown skeptical of such phenomena as an object of study. The poem's humor defeats overly serious readings of the love affair it seems to relate, while its aesthetic

programmatics are partially undermined by the poem's apparent incongruity in a poetry book prefaced by a renunciation (however qualified) of erotic verse in favor of nationalistic etiological poetry (Propertius 4.1). It is a measure, then, of the poem's power to entice its critics into seeking a window into Propertius's own affective life that even a critic who accepts the poem's tonal variation as an intrinsic part of its meaning might nevertheless read this as an outgrowth of Propertius's own ambivalent feelings for his genre. Even the effort, that is, to reconcile and move beyond the poem's central critical dichotomy is in this case grounded in assumptions about the poem as such a window.

For Micaela Janan, author of the most recent comprehensive study of Propertius, book 4, *The Politics of Desire* (2001), the divided history of critical responses to Propertius 4.7 reveals that the poem's humor does not sit well with its other elements. This division points in turn to a corresponding one, understandable, Janan posits, in the terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis, within Propertius himself. Indeed, "[t]his very incoherence whispers guilty knowledge of the elegist's representational and epistemological limits, and a desire not so much to transcend these limits . . . as to expose them."¹⁶ While Janan suggests elsewhere in her study that a questioning and uncertain sense of self was a characteristic Propertius shared with his audience of Augustus Romans seeking to position themselves securely in the new ideology of the Principate, her reading of Propertius 4.7 is very much centered on the personal motivations of the poet. The ghostly Cynthia's tie to the vulnerability and bodily infirmity of those who inhabit the socially marginal spaces represented by the elegiac "mistress"—not only the mistress herself but also the slaves who suffer by her or in her place—reveals Propertius's wish to have his reader interrogate comfortable suppositions about the place of women in the world imagined by the elegiac genre. Propertius, Janan maintains, "subtly lays bare the degree to which his own medium is implicated in perpetuating an unsustainable 'truth' about women."¹⁷

Janan's Cynthia suffers through and in her dependence on material support (as symbolized by her complaints about her inadequate funeral and request for a better tomb), a disquieting reminder of the "real" world exigencies that Roman elegiac poetry seeks in general to suppress. And yet such disruption, Janan posits, of what elegy, as a genre, holds to be true, so as to awaken skeptical scrutiny of prevailing ideology, is characteristic of the hopeful side of Lacanian *jouissance*. It is a source, that is, of the pleasure the poem provides for its author (and, potentially, we might suppose, for its audience, although this

latter suggestion remains largely implicit in Janan's text). "Propertius indicts the elegiac tradition," Janan concludes, "as representing only Woman, a masculine fantasy. The bravura diatribe he gives Cynthia passionately contrasts with that fantasy woman's (lived, experienced) reality, in all its pain and all its attachments to the concrete and material, as figured by the female body."¹⁸ Thus Cynthia's ghostly body, in all its troubling detail, is again the mark of Propertius's deeply held passion. The poet's pleasure in his creation derives from the combination of subversive humor and deadly seriousness with which he imbues this central figure.

From Postgate to Papanghelis to Janan, the way is cleared for us to our own "dead lover," a Cynthia in whose contours we trace the passions of an ancient poet. And yet a broad regard on the Latin literary tradition makes us hesitate before attempting to embrace this ghost, as powerful and seemingly natural as we may find the critical assumptions and methods that have brought us to her (or her to us). The formal and rhetorical similarities of Propertius 4.7 to one of the paradigmatic techniques of a different sort of Roman verbal artist, the public orator of the late Roman republic, have long been remarked by scholars, but they have yet to be fully appreciated for what they can tell us about the poem as a feature of a Roman culture spanning the late republic and the Principate and characterized by culturally transformative gestures such as Propertius's poem represents. *Mortuos ab inferis excitare* (calling up the dead from the Underworld) was a central rhetorical technique and one that Propertius 4.7 can be understood to adapt and transform. It is memorably illustrated for us by a passage with which both Propertius and his original audience of elite male Romans, trained as they were in rhetoric as a central part of a traditional education, would also have been familiar. Here, quoted nearly in its entirety, is Cicero's evocation in the *Pro Caelio* of the dead aristocrat and civic benefactor Appius Claudius Caecus, whose stern rebuke Cicero directs against Caecus's descendant, the infamous Clodia; Cicero insists on the latter's vengeful jealousy after being jilted by the handsome young Marcus Caelius as the driving force behind the trial in which he pleads on Caelius's behalf.

If [Appius] arises he will act and speak like this: "Woman, what business do you have with Caelius, what business with a young man, with a stranger? Why were you either so familiar with him that you would lend him money or so inimical to him that you would fear poison? Had you not seen that your father was a consul,

and heard that your uncle, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather, and great-great-great-grandfather were consuls? . . . What, therefore, was the reason if not a certain impetuosity and lust? But I ask, if the masks [i.e., ancestral busts] of our male line did not move you, did not even Q. Claudia, my own descendant, compel you to emulate the achievements of our clan in the renown that is appropriate to a woman? Or the famous Claudia, the Vestal Virgin, who, embracing her father when he was riding in his triumphal procession, prevented him from being dragged from the chariot by his enemy, a tribune of the plebs? . . . Was it for this that I dissolved the peace treaty with Pyrrhus: so that you might daily strike amorous bargains of the most shameful sort? Was it for this that I built an aqueduct to bring water to Rome: so that you might use it for unchaste purposes? Was it for this that I built a road: so that you might frequent it accompanied by strange men?" (Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 33–34)¹⁹

There is no need to posit the Ciceronian passage as a conscious subtext of Propertius 4.7; the technique it illustrates was in general use among orators of the late republic.²⁰ What is significant, rather, is the way that Propertius's poem revises the republican oratorical technique for the Augustan audience of erotic elegy and so bridges the cultural and political gap separating the republic's style of aggressive self-promotion on the part of a clan-centered elite from the Princeps-centered ideology of Augustus. Cynthia's monologue is marked as a "legal" indictment. The verb *insector* (pursue), for example, which describes her tirade (49), or the oath she swears in affirming her own fidelity (51–53) or the characterization of her words as a *querula lis* (plaintive quarrel) (95) are all recognizable as features of Roman legal process.²¹ Her reproach of Propertius, moreover, in the context of a legalistic "speech" reproduces at least two prevalent aspects of the evocation of the dead in legal oratory such as Cicero's: an emphasis on bearing witness to innocence or guilt and a reliance on exemplary figures from the past to lend weight to an argument. Cicero's Appius, for instance, bears witness to Clodia's sexual indiscretion and the faithfulness shown by female members of his family; Propertius's Cynthia bears witness to her lover's faithlessness and her own faithfulness. While Appius "arrives" to deal with a charge of poisoning and a suspicious exchange of gold (part of the basis of the case against Cicero's client, Caelius), Propertius's Cynthia charges

Propertius's slaves Lygdamus and Nomas with poisoning her and goes on to accuse Propertius's new mistress of melting down her golden statue so as to have a "dowry" (35–38, 47–48).²² Appius cites a series of exemplary figures from his family so as to lend weight to his "indictment," while Cynthia likens herself to the mythical heroines Andromeda and Hypermestra, with whom she claims to share a place in the Elysian Fields (63–70), so as to lend weight to hers.

The similarities, furthermore, between Propertius's adaptation of *mortuos ab inferis excitare* and Cicero's *prosopopoeia* of Appius exist in tension with a series of important differences between the world of Propertian erotic elegy and the republican civic context of a speech such as the *Pro Caelio*. Because she is a woman and a *meretrix*, for example, Cynthia's invective naturally carries far less political weight than would that of a male civic exemplum such as Appius. Propertius might simply have left this fact to be assumed by his audience, and yet he signals it by having Cynthia reverse the priorities of public moral discourse in which a republican orator like Cicero participates. Even as Cynthia reproaches Propertius for faithlessness, she complains that he has forgotten their "stolen love" (15: *furta*), their lovemaking at the crossroads, and their "silent pact" (21: *foederis . . . taciti*). All these constitute admissions that would, from the perspective of a Cicero and an Appius Claudius Caecus, be a basis for reproach!²³ Propertius thus both revises a central component of republican oratorical culture *and* provides his audience with clues that this is what he is doing.²⁴

The collective concerns of Propertius's audience of Augustan Romans can be seen to motivate such artistic choices, whether conscious or unconscious, on Propertius's part. We are able, furthermore, to posit such collective concerns with far greater confidence than we are those of Propertius himself, because of our far greater body of evidence, both textual and material, for the basic outlines of Augustan ideology and the assent that it garnered from among Augustus's subjects (Propertius's poems, by contrast, are the virtually our only "evidence" for his life). Augustus identified the "restoration" of republican traditions as a fundamental aspect of his program and sought to replace the traditional aristocratic patriarchy that had failed in the late republic. Many members of the old elite had in fact been killed in the civil wars that spelled the republic's demise and brought Augustus himself to power. Undertaken in the shadow of such large-scale violence, Augustus's "restoration" of the *res publica* required careful oversight of the expression of political power in all its forms, including the invective and self-promotion of public verbal performances such as oratory. The Augustan regime was, generally speaking, a tolerant one; Augustus

allowed for a great deal of interpretation, and even dissent, on the part of poets and other authors whose activities he encouraged. Some of the uses, however, to which verbal performance had been put under the republic were simply incompatible with the rule of a Princeps.²⁵ Judicial speeches, such as Cicero's *Pro Caelio*, in service of political self-promotion (for Cicero's identification with the glorious house of the Claudii has strong political overtones) would now cede to a form of judicial oratory that, if no less rich and varied in its techniques, would nevertheless have to keep more distance from politics than its republican predecessor.²⁶

Augustus himself, and with him his subjects, sought new ways to understand, fashion, and display the relationship between the present and the past and did so in part as a means of addressing and repairing the damage to the social fabric caused by the traumas of the civil wars. Recent readings of Augustan elegy, including the psychoanalytic approach advanced by Micaela Janan, have in fact foregrounded its response to this failure of republican institutions.²⁷ Elegy's (anti)heroic lover, its focus on a female love object, and its glorification of erotic rather than political life, can all be seen as "remedies" that it offers, however ambivalently or imperfectly, for social upheaval and displacement. Propertius and his audience were aware of a failure in Roman aristocratic institutions while persisting in the appropriation and transformation of these very institutions, perhaps because the hope that some aspects of tradition could be preserved in spite of contradiction and change was potentially as uplifting as the actual experience of institutional failure was conducive to despair. I wish, however, to push these assumptions further in the case of Propertius 4.7 than, it would seem, the poem's intense focus on Propertius's personal affective life has allowed scholars to do previously. "Restoring" aspects of republican oratory, I propose, most indicative of the traditional authority of the orator is one such act motivated by collective concerns, a stabilizing performance in spite, or even because, of the contradictions and tensions it might generate.²⁸

Indeed, the potential appeal of such an act seems even to arise from contradiction and tension. On the one hand, Augustan audiences would have been likely to be attracted to types of literary performance that suggested republican oratory's emphasis on genealogy, with all the traditional authority that this aspect of oratory had lent the republican orator and oratory itself. Cicero himself, for example, became the great literary "ancestor" of the declaimers, rhetorical performers who not only quoted and adapted Cicero's words but also called attention to the very episode of Cicero's life—his failed conflict with Marcus

Antonius—sure to set in positive relief Augustus’s own successful battle with Antonius for political supremacy (The Elder Seneca, *Controversiae*, 7.2; *Suasoriae*, 6 and 7). While different in composition from the republican aristocracy, the Augustan elite was nevertheless fascinated with traditional forms of ancestral display, as has been shown, for instance, in the case of the *imagines maiorum*, wax images of deceased family members carried in the aristocratic funeral procession.²⁹ A poem such as Propertius 4.7 has the “ritual” function of integrating past and present, the living and the dead. It does so, however, in a politically acceptable, if ambivalent, ironic, and even humorous way likely to appeal to elite Augustan audiences.

On the other hand, Propertius seems to engage in a clever imitation of Augustus through his celebration of erotic bonds that connect the living to the dead. The poem presents, as it were, a countergenealogy, expressed in “oratorical” performance and might have been especially enticing to his audience for this reason. Approval of the poem is emulation of the Princeps but places laughter and love alongside gravity and civic-mindedness.³⁰ *Elegy* 4.7 not only describes a bond between erotic partners but also fosters a bond between successive generations of those who take an interest in elegy and Propertius’s poems. The ghostly Cynthia, with her critical regard on the success of Propertius’s poetry and its implications for herself, is a figure for, an “ancestor” of, Propertius’s audiences, readers, and interpreters to come.

As I hope to have made clear, Propertius 4.7, while it focuses our attention on the personal attachment embodied by a dead lover, transforms the public oratorical evocation of dead family members and ancestors into a feature of Propertius’s elegiac performance. A technique that had been exploited to great effect by republican speakers for politically charged invective and self-promotion now becomes part of elegy’s focus on erotic rather than genealogical ties, an aspect of the elegist’s complex, ambivalent embedding of the public in the private. The rhetorical form of Propertius 4.7, its technique of conjuring up the dead Cynthia, points to collective as well as personal concerns: to the desire to bridge cultural and political rupture as well as personal loss. And this is where the poem offers us the most, I propose, in our reflections on the scholarly practice through which the poem itself has been read and appreciated since the nineteenth century. As individual scholars, we, too, are motivated by concerns of a collective: in our case, the intellectual community, with all the social, cultural, and political value it continues to locate in antiquity, and in bridging the far greater rupture that separates us from the Greco-Roman past.

The rhetoric of identification with ancient authors—their intentions, desires, and passions—has deep roots in a style of nineteenth-century biographic criticism that it was a central project of much twentieth-century criticism to question and reject; and yet it remains a powerful technique, visible still in a host of discourses associated with the academy. At a more radical level, it would seem indisassociable from the possibility of continued “scholarship” itself, which relies on discovering the tenuousness of previous interpretations, the “conjurings” of a previous generation of scholars whose visions may now be exposed as mere phantasmagoria.³¹

We may lose, however, by employing such rhetoric unquestioningly; it can be more helpful to see it as just that, a persuasive technique. And this is the very feature of the representation of a dead lover—the rhetorical and cultural dimensions of such an act, its address to a collective itself highly trained in rhetorical techniques and culture—of which Propertius 4.7, in spite of its critical history, can make us refreshingly aware. Indeed, it is a dimension of the poem to which scholars for a long time seem to have remained “blind” in focusing almost exclusively on the interpretation of Propertius 4.7 as way to open a window onto the personal affective life of the ancient poet, Propertius. But such blindness itself may be instructive. For Propertius encouraged his original audience to hear the poem as more than this, to see in the dead Cynthia more than “the Roman elegist’s dead lover.” Propertius 4.7, with its elusive ghost, can, too, be more for us, provided we seek to embrace instead the challenge to received methods of scholarly practice that it poses.

NOTES

1. For an introduction to Propertius and Roman erotic elegy, see Miller 2002. Propertius, book 4, was published around 16 BCE under Rome’s first emperor, or Princeps, Augustus. The Augustan erotic elegists (Propertius, Tibullus, Ovid) write of their passions for particular girls—in Propertius’s case, Cynthia—whose names an ancient source identifies as pseudonyms for the poets’ real lovers (Apuleius, *Apologia*, 10; but cf. Kennedy 1993, 84–91). All quotations from the Latin text of Propertius are from Barber’s Oxford edition. Translations are my own.

2. Parts of this essay appear in more fully developed form elsewhere. For a more extensive survey of scholarship and consideration of how a reading of Propertius 4.7 might challenge notions of a desiring, intending subject, identified with the author, as an object of our interpretation, see Dufallo 2005; for a more detailed comparison between Propertius 4.7 and Cicero’s *Pro Caelio*, see Dufallo 2003. I reproduce some essentials of both these earlier essays insofar as is necessary for the different aims of the present one.

3. For a similar claim, see Kennedy, who observes that “modern ‘historicizing’ scholarship [on Roman erotic elegy] emerges as a reprise of an ancient reading practice [which treated poetry as confessional]” (1993, 89; cf. 1–23 on the “rhetoric of reality” as a feature of such scholarship). Kennedy remarks how a “rhetoric of objectivity effacing its own historicity” operates “to identify interpretation with hermeneutics, and to mask appropriation, either relegating it to a secondary sphere of ‘reception’ or projecting it as a disreputable other” as he points out the usefulness of an approach that would not simply reverse this hierarchy but recognize “that each term is not separate from the other, but involves it” (85–86). I am grateful to the anonymous reader for the University of Michigan Press for pointing out the affinities between my own emphasis on poetic/scholarly “conjuring” of the dead and that of Nicholas Watson on the “shamanistic” model informing modern studies of medieval mysticism (see Watson 1999, esp. 67–72). I find especially compelling Watson’s account of scholarship “haunted by echoes of a past that finds ghostly ways of speaking through them *whether they like it or not*, curiously shaping the desires they express and the language they use to express it” (72).

4. On the problematic but paradigmatic figure of Sappho, for example, see Prins 1999, esp. 52–73.

5. Postgate 1884, xxvii.

6. Ibid., xvii.

7. Ibid., xviii.

8. Ibid., xviii–xix.

9. For illustrative biographical readings, see Butler 1905, 4–5; Lake 1937; Helmbold 1949; Enk 1957, 29–30; Boucher 1965, 82, 95; and Burck 1966, 417–18. For further bibliography, see Warden 1980, 78–79.

10. On the *Iliad* reference and its implications for understanding the poem’s broader allusiveness, see Hubbard 1974, 149–52; Mueke 1974, 125–28; Warden 1980, 14–15, 18–21, 76–77; and Dimundo 1990, 27–43.

11. Papanghelis 1987, 7, 19.

12. Ibid., 78–79; III (borrowing the words of Fletcher [1973, 26] on Swinburne’s “Les Noyades”).

13. Papanghelis 1987, 149.

14. Ibid., 147.

15. Ibid., 8.

16. Janan 2001, 107.

17. Ibid., 112.

18. Ibid., 113.

19. My translation of the Latin text of the *Pro Caelio* in Clark’s Oxford edition.

20. Cf. Cicero’s account of Servilius’s evocation of the dead Metelli in *Oratio post reditum in senatu habita*, 25, and *Pro Sestio*, 130–31. Valerius Maximus 6.2.8 describes Helvius Mancianus’s similar evocation of the illustrious Roman dead, victims of civil war, he claims to have seen in the underworld.

21. See further Warden 1980, 37; and Guillemain 1950, 190. The familiarity of poisoning as a charge in rhetorical school declamation (on which see Warden 1980, 37; and

Krokowski 1926, 95) would have made it still more likely for Propertius's audience to draw a connection between Propertius 4.7 and the republican oratorical tradition.

22. Cf. Warden 1980, 37.

23. Indeed, Cicero's Appius asks if he built a road (the Via Appia) so that Clodia might frequent it accompanied by strange men; he upbraids Clodia for striking daily "pacts" (*foedera*) with her lovers (Cicero, *Pro Caelio*, 34).

24. For more on Propertius's distancing of Cynthia from the power centers of Roman politics through his description of her funeral and grave, see Dufallo 2003, 168–69. It is important to note that an audience familiar with "Cynthia" as a character in Propertius's work would have recognized the potential humor and irony in the "obscure" Cynthia evoked in Propertius 4.7, since a series of other depictions undermine this aspect of her (self-)portrait here (cf., e.g., Propertius 2.3.1–4, 29, 33; 2.5.1–2, 5–6, 27–30; 2.20.22; 3.2.17–26; 3.24.5).

25. To be sure, judicial oratory flourished under the Principate and legal advocacy remained a primary career path, as it had been earlier. Imperial rhetoric takes over republican techniques in virtually all their forms—Quintilian in fact recommends the topos *defunctos excitare*, especially for the emotional conclusions of speeches (*Institutio oratoria*, 4.1.28).

26. Cf. Kennedy 1972, 301–4.

27. See especially Janan 2001; Miller 1999 and 2004; Gold 1993.

28. In describing Propertian elegy as "performance," I refer to the fact that, in spite of the literary self-consciousness of the Augustan poets, "the written text continues to be felt as no more than the basis for a performance" with the "normal route of access to a work" usually "a private reading by the author to a small group" (Quinn 1982, 144–45). Ovid recalls that Propertius "was accustomed often to recite his fiery loves according to the obligation of fellowship that joined him to me" (*saepe suos solitus recitare . . . ignes / iure sodalicii, quo mihi iunctus erat* [*Tristia* 4.10.45–46]). For more on Roman elegy as a performance genre, see Gamel 1998; and Skinner 1993.

29. Flower 1996, 223–69.

30. The material aspects of Augustan culture help us especially to put ourselves in the place of Augustus's subjects, surrounded by evidence of the Princeps' dominance and the power of the ideology he fostered. The colonnades, for example, of the Forum Augustum, a central component in Augustus's building program, were decorated with statues of members and ancestors of Augustus's line (the Julian gens). It was an imposing sight, a powerful symbol, in spite of internal tensions and contradictions, of "Augustus' efforts to impose unity on Rome's eclectic heritage" to "coax a totality from the division and incoherence of Roman cultural identity" (Janan 2001, 4).

31. I thank David Halperin for this observation.

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Wilfred Owen's Adonis

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WILLIAM BELL, MY NINTH-GRADE ENGLISH TEACHER, used to begin his poetry unit with the admonition that "poetry is not about daffodils in the meadow turning their cheeks to be kissed by the wind; poetry is strong stuff," and he would then prove his anti-Wordsworthian point by reciting Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," with its image of consumptive Tommies cursing their way through sludge. The present paper is about a similar point in another of Owen's poems that Mr. Bell read us. We are concentrating on an image of a wounded soldier about halfway through "Disabled."¹

He sat in a wheeled chair, waiting for dark,
 And shivered in his ghastly suit of grey,
 Legless, sewn short at elbow. Through the park
 Voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn,
 Voices of play and pleasure after day,
 Till gathering sleep had mothered them from him.

About this time Town used to swing so gay
 When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees,
 And girls glanced lovelier as the air grew dim,—
 In the old times, before he threw away his knees.
 Now he will never feel again how slim
 Girls' waists are, or how warm their subtle hands.
 All of them touch him like some queer disease.

There was an artist silly for his face,
 For it was younger than his youth, last year.
 Now, he is old; his back will never brace;

He's lost his colour very far from here,
 Poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry,
 And half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race
 And leap of purple spurted from his thigh.

One time he liked a blood-smear down his leg,
 After the matches, carried shoulder-high.
 It was after football, when he'd drunk a peg,
 He thought he'd better join.—He wonders why.
 Someone had said he'd look a god in kilts,
 That's why; and maybe, too, to please his Meg,
 Aye, that was it, to please the giddy jilts
 He asked to join. He didn't have to beg;
 Smiling they wrote his lie: aged nineteen years.

Germans he scarcely thought of; all their guilt,
 And Austria's, did not move him. And no fears
 Of Fear came yet. He thought of jewelled hilts
 For daggers in plaid socks; of smart salutes;
 And care of arms; and leave; and pay arrears;
 Esprit de corps; and hints for young recruits.
 And soon, he was drafted out with drums and cheers.

Some cheered him home, but not as crowds cheer Goal.
 Only a solemn man who brought him fruits
Thanked him; and then enquired about his soul.

Now, he will spend a few sick years in institutes,
 And do what things the rules consider wise,
 And take whatever pity they may dole.
 Tonight he noticed how the women's eyes
 Passed from him to the strong men that were whole.
 How cold and late it is! Why don't they come
 And put him into bed? Why don't they come?

The poem was evidently written in the late summer of 1917 as part of Owen's output during his treatment for shell shock in Craiglockhart, a military hospital

in Scotland, and his association there with Siegfried Sassoon. At issue here is a detail in the third stanza: "... he's lost his colour very far from here, / poured it down shell-holes till the veins ran dry, / and half his lifetime lapsed in the hot race, / and leap of purple spurted from his thigh." The last line cited follows lines 25–27 of the *Epitaph on Adonis* of Bion of Smyrna (ca. 100 BCE), specifically in Andrew Lang's English translation, the most widely read of the early twentieth century. There the image attaches to the original dead lover, or rather dying beloved of the Greek goddess of love, slain by a wild boar: "But round his navel the dark blood leapt forth, with blood from his thighs his chest was scarlet, and beneath Adonis's breast, the spaces that afore were snow-white, were purple with blood."² Bion also wrote on the myth of Hyacinthus (the topic of an extant four-line fragment) and probably on that of Orpheus, and so seems to have been drawn to mythological dead lovers. The *Adonis*, his longest extant work, describes the death of Adonis and lamentation of Aphrodite. To account for it so tidily, however, comes nowhere near the poem's real strangeness, its combination of dry restraint and wild emotion, sensuality and tragedy, its violation of the poetic norms of temporality and place. It approximates what Albert (1988) terms a mimetic poem in the Hellenistic tradition, like certain of Callimachus' hymns that lead the audience through a simulation of an actual ceremony; but here the narration is freed even further from the spatial and chronological facts of the rites, which yield to their tacit etiology, the myth. The movement is cinematic: scenes loom before us and dissolve. The chiasmic structure takes us on an abrupt, disorienting journey from the bedchamber of Aphrodite's palace to the forest and back again in only very rough chronological order. I stress the cinematic effect of reader as viewer; the poem is driven by images and their emotional correlatives in an almost symbolistic way. Our unidentified narrator overwhelmingly assimilates the viewpoint of the bereaved goddess-lover, contemplating the bleeding body of Adonis with both grief and sensory gratification. Thus the poem turns the viewer into mourner and desirer together; that is, tropes eros and pathos narratologically. It is the first poem I know of to create such a view on a dead lover.

Aside from later echoes in treatments of the myth of Adonis (by Propertius and Ovid, for example, and in later European poetry), I identify two main lines of reception of this text: first, in the "pastoral elegy" on a poet, through the anonymous *Epitaph on Bion*, a very different poem, which provides the impetus for the line of English pastoral elegies on poets that includes Milton's *Lycidas*, Shelley's *Adonais*, and Arnold's *Thyrsis* (though of these only the *Adonais*,

Shelley's elegy on Keats, goes back to rework Bion's poem significantly).³ In this tradition, Adonis furnishes a gratifyingly tractable figure for a fellow poet, both compelling and inert. The other main line of reception is, surprisingly, in Latin epic, beginning with Virgil, who fashions the view on certain fallen warriors—Euryalus, Pallas, Lausus, and Camilla—after that on Adonis, thus inventing for epic a productive species of voyeuristic necrophilia that will be picked up by such later epic poets as Statius and Silius Italicus.⁴ Virgil unties the Bionesque viewpoint from a single character, creating a vaguer, more capacious source of desire, sometimes identifiable with a particular character like Nisus or Aeneas, but only provocatively and problematically. Even more than in Bion, viewpoint becomes a metaphorical solvent between the personae of reader, character, narrator, poet, precursor, and so on.

Owen's "Disabled" can be read meaningfully within both main lines of reception. I propose to use the intertextual comparison in this one line to expose the way an Adonis-model works in the subtext of Owen's poem, what I call its Adoniasm (a term I gratefully adopt from Aristophanes). Owen's maimed boy is like maimed Adonis in his age, for one thing: perhaps still no older than nineteen. And in his good looks: his loss is couched in terms of an irrevocable loss of youthful beauty and desirability. Despite the brevity of the allusion, a specifically Bionean reading of the poem would resonate in certain other details: one might see in the hospitalized soldier's death-in-life a development of Bion's persistent assimilation of immortal Aphrodite to dying Adonis, and especially of the conceit that "Fair was the form of Cypris, while Adonis was living, but her beauty has died with Adonis!"—and alongside that, a correction of the conceit that makes his beauty persist even after death: "Ah, even in death he is beautiful, beautiful in death, as one that hath fallen on sleep" (Lang's translations of lines 30–31, 71). The subjectivity that Bion gives Aphrodite is transferred to the Adonis-figure, a point I shall return to. Pursuing the logic of these correspondences, the determined Bionist will discern yet more common elements and find interest in their new configurations: "voices of boys rang saddening like a hymn" evokes the lamenting Loves, the Erotes or Cupids who choir the refrain of the *Epitaph on Adonis*. "Gathering sleep" recalls both the sleep to which Bion likens Adonis' death (cited above) and the sleep from which the first lines of his poem rouse Aphrodite to lamentation. "When will they come and put him into bed?" echoes and revises the Bionean narrator's behest to lay Adonis' corpse on Aphrodite's rich bed. The present reading, however, seeks primarily not to examine specific correspondences to Bion's poem but to explore

how Owen's poem renders certain themes in the Adoniac tradition, particularly as they are activated and organized by the echo at the end of the third stanza. Subjectivity and poetic consciousness emerge as foci of these themes.

From the opening of "Disabled," colorlessness suffuses the soldier's new world, in the "ghastly suit of grey" he wears and the loss of access to the "light blue trees." The loss of color (vividly identified, in the verse we are focusing on, with the loss of blood: "leap of purple"), also occurs in Bion ("beneath his brows his eyes wax heavy and dim, and the rose flees from his lip" in Lang's version)⁵ and even more vividly in Virgil's adaptations. It is implicit in his deaths of Euryalus, Lausus, and Pallas in the *Aeneid* but is especially evident in the death of Camilla, which is practically a translation of the lines of Bion just quoted: "She sank down bloodless, her eyes sank cold in death, the former crimson [*purpureus*] color left her face [or lips]."⁶ "Purple" is the issue, in Owen as in Bion ("purple with blood") and Virgil: a Classical motif, a metaphor from the rich red "purple-dye," a Levantine product, that connotes Oriental luxury and wealth, royalty, divinity, passion.⁷ Bion swathes his Adonis in the "purple" sheets of Aphrodite's bed, both nuptial bower and bier. A loss of color also appears in the dying face in Owen's superb "fragment" of late 1917, "I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson" ("crimson" being less intense, less aestheticizing terminology for what is signified by "purple").⁸

I saw his round mouth's crimson deepen as it fell,
 Like a sun, in his last deep hour;
 Watched the magnificent recession of farewell,
 Clouding, half gleam, half glower,
 And a last splendour burn the heavens of his cheek.
 And in his eyes
 The cold stars lighting, very old and bleak,
 In different skies.

Cold eyes come into this voyeuristic image too; change the pronouns and you have a spectacular reworking of the death of Camilla, with an interesting appropriation of the viewpoint (which in the Virgilian passage, characteristically, shifts from source to source).

The intensification and loss of "crimson" here signifies, like the cold stars lighting in different skies, the withdrawal that makes the object of the description so fascinating and suffuses the lines' "I" with unstated desire. In

"Disabled," the withdrawal ("He's lost his color very far from here") is paradoxical, the same person being simultaneously contemplator and object. And here the loss of purple uses Bion himself to correct a traditional emphasis on the lush sensuality of the dead Adonis, Adonis as a work of art. Oscar Wilde overtly aestheticizes Bion's image of the bed: "[The Greek artist] held the gem against the revolving disk, and the amethyst became the purple couch for Adonis."⁹ Owen's image might be read as a metapoetic allegory: a draining of the lush idealism of Romantic poetry, Keats, Tennyson, Swinburne, the Symbolists, the Decadents—all that *was* poetry to Owen. Hibberd (1986, 33) writes of the pervasive "purple" in Owen's early work, traceable to these very traditions (perhaps most flagrantly in a 1916 poem titled "Purple"), saying of "Disabled": "The purple wound . . . illustrates the Decadent element in Owen's mature poetry, the colour still carrying its poetic significance and thereby giving new meaning to the bloodthirstiness of war." Color is used similarly in the first stanza: "When glow-lamps budded in the light blue trees"—the line is vaguely Decadent, casting natural things positively in artificial, pictorial terms. The image is remembered, as the poetic style is for Owen in the past.

The "artist silly for his face" (with its shades of Basil Hallward in Wilde's *Dorian Gray*: we are remembering a Decadent adoration of young male beauty) frames the disabled soldier's lost looks as the object of artistic preservation. "Younger than his youth" evokes a paradox close to Dorian Gray's. Unlike Dorian, he does not preserve his beauty. With him we remember his former life in late Romantic terms that the poem renders inadequate. The love of youth, and sense of its loss, in Housman's "To an Athlete Dying Young" is also translated into this poem, not only in the next lines ("carried shoulder-high") but even anticipated metonymically in the "hot race" of blood out of his wound, whose "leap of purple" suggests the starting line and the prize to be won.¹⁰ But in memory the war wound, unlike the Housmanian football injury ("hearty," athletic, antiaesthetic), becomes aestheticized, even painterly: "he's lost his color"—as if his paintability; "poured it" like paint; "and leap of purple"—again, the color term taps into a decorative tradition.¹¹ Most striking, the contrast between lost youthful vigor and present helplessness corrects the way, in Housman's poem, youthful vigor is somehow preserved by young death: "Smart lad, to slip betimes away / From fields where glory does not stay."

It is a commonplace of Owen criticism, qualified and refined by a succession of critics, that in his later war poems the poet rejects his earlier Romantic style along with a sentimental, conciliatory attitude toward the war; or, better,

that the tropes he absorbed from Romantic poetry—and the more specifically homoerotic Uranian poetry of the 1880s and 1890s—turn to less idealizing purposes. The image under discussion here responds to the deployment in these traditions of Adonis and similar tragic youths: Hyacinthus, Narcissus, Endymion, Hylas, Antinous, Saint Sebastian. Saint William of Norwich joins Christ as such a type in an 1892 Uranian poem by F. Rolfe (a.k.a. “Baron Corvo”) and J. G. Nicholson: “Fair as the Boy that Mary loved was he / . . . nor has the beauty fled / From his still form with blood-stained limbs outspread,” where the persistence of beauty and the verb *fled* reach back to Bion’s *Adonis*.¹² Bion is even more pointedly adverted to in this tradition by Percy Lancelot Osborn’s “Corydon,” published in 1893 by Alfred Douglas in *The Spirit Lamp*, which opens: “Now Corydon is gone, the Loves lament, / And with the Loves lament a troop of boys.” The name comes, of course, from that most reliable homoerotic resource of educated Britons, Virgil’s second *Eclogue*—though from Bliss Carmen’s *Corydon*, a pastoral elegy on the death of Matthew Arnold in the manner of the latter’s *Thyrsis*,¹³ it tendentiously gathers in the thread of a different, non-Uranian poetry. Osborn’s opening announces this confrontation, this inflection of the Arnoldian tradition to the uses of Uranian desire, by echoing the distinctive repetitions of the opening of Bion’s poem: “I lament Adonis: fair Adonis is dead; fair Adonis is dead, the Loves lament in response.”¹⁴

In Owen’s “The Kind Ghosts” (dated July 1918 in the only manuscript), a queenly goddess figure “sleeps on soft, last breaths” in a palace walled with “boys on boys and dooms on dooms.” She is Aphrodite as blithe destroyer, battenning on her myriad of slain mortal lovers, heedless of “what red mouths were torn” to keep her roses ever blooming. “Quiet their blood lies in her crimson rooms . . . lest aught she be disturbed, or grieved at all.”¹⁵ One aspect of the poem’s distinctly Decadent makeup is its recollection of Bion’s *Adonis*, where a contrapuntal reading of Aphrodite’s fervid lament discloses a barely concealed claustrophobia and dread of female power (if we look for particular points of contact with the Greek poem, we may compare the mouths like roses, the last breaths, and the sleeping woman in a palace—this last like Aphrodite before Bion’s narrator wakes her to grief). One recalls the Adonis of Swinburne’s *Laus Veneris*, tormented victim of the goddess. Owen’s picture of lush destruction,¹⁶ implicitly transposed to the Great War and its destruction of boys (the incorporation of her dead boys into the architecture unsettlingly recalls the reality of the trenches) and aimed at the civilian complacency that much of Owen’s later poetry targets (“Miners” offers an apt parallel), makes each sphere comment

on the other: we are exposed to the inadequacy of late Romantic discourse in a situation of real devastation, yet the language and the equivalences it enforces translate the Great War into a wider culture, one that can refer as easily to sensuality and desire as to cruelty and annihilation.

Where our basic problem—the coalescence of desire and mourning—is concerned, we can draw upon Haggerty (2004), who sees desire as inevitably present in all literary elegy and its consolatory aims, especially as transfiguring and redirecting a sense of lack and loss, proper to both love and grief, that might otherwise be inarticulable. The presence of *Adonais* in the literary background, too huge to deal with extensively here, offers a special perspective on certain aspects of Owen's place in the tradition descending from Bion and, most especially, of his revision of Romantic poetics. Najarian traces Shelley's elegy in Owen's "A Terre" (an address by a maimed, hospitalized soldier, reminiscent of "Disabled") and "I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson," in the latter of which he finds that "Owen replays the attraction of his youth for Keats but gives Keats the soldier's body" and that "[t]he poet and the body, corpse and *corpus*, have become one."¹⁷ The wounded soldier in "Disabled" provides another such body. When, mocking his own Keatsophilia in a 1913 letter to his mother, Owen writes, "To be in love with a youth and a dead 'un is perhaps sillier than with a real, live maid," he might be glossing in advance the 1917 poem.¹⁸ Shelley's assimilation of Keats to both Bion and Bion's Adonis, in which he follows the anonymous *Epitaph on Bion*, had in turn emboldened Morton Fullerton, in an 1890 essay, to envision Bion "as a pathetic figure in that rushing lively time, too delicate to struggle for advancement, with tenderest thoughts for all; brimming over with sweet and nice rare fancies"—i.e., as Keats—and to extol the Greek poet's "sensuous, sensitive, almost tenuously refined organism." Thus Adonis, too, becomes potentially a trope for Romantic poetry, at least in its too-good-for-this-world Keatsian image, and the Adonis-figure becomes peculiarly available for wartime rethinkings of that inheritance.¹⁹

Now consider Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth," where the more straightforward substitutions of the first lines yield to a subtler trope, very reminiscent of *Adonais* in phrasing and the personification of abstractions like thoughts:²⁰

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
—Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle

Can patter out their hasty orisons.
 No mockeries now for them; no prayers or bells,
 Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs,—
 The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
 And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
 Not in the hands of boys but in their eyes
 Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
 The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
 Their flowers the tenderness of silent minds,
 And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

The barely embodied glimmers, pallor, and tenderness—diffractions of Bion's Loves through Shelley's more rarefied mourners—are of a piece with, but also contrast with, the demonic personification (or depersonification) in "shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells." There is a turn toward compromise and mitigation at the sestet, signaled by the introduction of "sad shires" (a Housmanian, and Wordsworthian, pathetic fallacy). One would not have expected from the first eight lines that boys and girls would after all, if not quite in the way approved by authorized war poetry, preserve the proper mourning for these who die as cattle. The "tenderness of silent minds" grants more to the Nation at Home than Owen's later poetry, including "Disabled," normally does. But the tension and change between Romanticism and a less idealized reading of life are palpable.

Owen's prewar sonnet "The One Remains" (the title comes from stanza LII of *Adonais*) already revises Shelley's Platonism by overlaying it with a Keatsian—or even Uranian—sensuality, an almost Cavafyan attention to beautiful faces, remembered or imagined (perhaps, to put it crudely, by reading Keats and the post-Keatsian tradition against Shelley, thus in a sense answering *Adonais*). Here the myriad of absent lovers becomes the rationale for a Shelleyan sublimation, which nevertheless fails to transcend the corporeal entirely: "Their reminiscences would cease my heart, / Except I still hoped find, some time, some place, / All beauty, once for ever, in one face."²¹ By 1917–18, this focus on the body has grown into the almost obsessive, voyeuristic interest in the beauty of young soldiers—especially doomed or dead—that we find in "I Saw His Round Mouth's Crimson" and elsewhere. Owen (and similarly minded

war poets)²² here follows precedents like Rimbaud's "Le dormeur du val" and Whitman's "Vigil Strange I Kept on the Field One Night," both on dead soldiers. Keith Comer sees in Whitman, as in Owen, an eventual rejection, in response to the brutality of modern warfare, of "the Romantic sublime and its demands for transcendence," which both poets avoid by an intense focus on the body.²³ Fussell also notices the "sensuous immediacy" of Owen's bodies, especially his attention to corporeal details, through which "he arrives by disciplined sublimation at a state of profound pity for those who for such a brief moment possess them."²⁴ He adds: "He seems skilled in the deployment of the sympathetic imagination as defined by Keats."

It is Owen's avowed poetic ideal of "pity" that Shelley's poetics seem both to urge and to impede, and in its service the figure of Adonis—whether in the formulations of *Adonais* or in the metaphorical guise of a (once) handsome young soldier—provides a corrective trope. Here one is reminded of how the Uranians gathered Christ, along with pagan demigods and Christian martyrs, into the figure of the beautiful slain youth and of Owen's adaption—partly in reaction to his Evangelical childhood—of Wilde's idea of Christ as aesthetic sufferer and artist, speaker for those in pain who cannot speak.²⁵ Against this background, the Adonis-model accommodates some of the indictment of the war as a savage, quasi-biblical sacrifice that emerges in late poems like "The Parable of the Old Man and the Young" (a variation on Abraham and Isaac: "But the old man would not so, but slew his son, / And half the seed of Europe, one by one") and "Spring Offensive."²⁶ "My subject is war, and the pity of war," Owen famously intended to declare in his unfinished preface. "The poetry is in the pity."²⁷ But the chain of sympathy that this pity aims to set up between poet, reader, and character, when it is embodied in a well-established poetics of sensuality, subsumes and transfigures the quality into something closer to desire, even as it bends desire to something more like identification.

"Disabled" further frustrates transcendence, further transfigures desire and its relation to poet, reader, and character. While one is thinking of Adonis as a figure for the dead poet—an operation perhaps made available above all by the precedent of *Adonais*—one can also conceive of the male body in "Disabled" as a rebuke to Rupert Brooke's "Peace" (especially the sestet), where the war is supposed to redeem the sexually contaminated.

Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour,
And caught our youth, and wakened us from sleeping,

With hand made sure, clear eye, and sharpened power,
 To turn, as swimmers into cleanness leaping,
 Glad from a world grown old and cold and weary,
 Leave the sick hearts that honour could not move,
 And half-men, and their dirty songs and dreary,
 And all the little emptiness of love!

Oh! we, who have known shame, we have found release there,
 Where there's no ill, no grief, but sleep has mending,
 Naught broken save this body, lost but breath;
 Nothing to shake the laughing heart's long peace there
 But only agony, and that has ending;
 And the worst friend and enemy is but Death.

All we have to lose is our bodies. This comports with the ideal "chivalric" purity of body documented for Great War writing by Fussell, who documents how the soldiers themselves tended to reject and purposefully undermine this discourse.²⁸ In "Disabled," we have the body rendered by war sexually unsulliable: "Now he will never feel again how slim / Girls' waists are." The war itself answers and perversely confirms the ideal that Brooke did not live to test.

Brooke's own youth, good looks, and amorous poetic output recommend himself as an Adonis-figure. Peter Austen makes him a floral dying god, like Adonis or Hyacinthus:²⁹

Oh Lovely Lover! No, thou art not fled!
 From thy red mouth blow poppies glowingly!
 And the wild hyacinth above thy head,
 Sprang from the tender, dreaming eyes of thee!

The third edition of Frazer's *Golden Bough*, with its vegetation-god interpretation of Adonis and similar figures, had come out in 1913; more could be said, incidentally, about the way the Uranian figure of Adonis is inflected by Frazerian ideas in this period (in Owen's own "Futility," for example) and later by poets like Eliot and Pound, on the way to producing a sort of modernist Adonis, diverted from sensuality toward a higher cultural message. It would be unfairly reductive to read the disabled boy's fatuous reasons for enlisting as a satire on the vanities that impelled the likes of Rupert Brooke into war. But implicit is a pervasively

common and maybe inevitable reading of Brooke as the model behind all the English war dead, potentially making them all dead lovers. Owen's poem gathers Brooke into Adonis only to reject an idealization they both represent.

But as Frazer makes of Adonis not only a dying but a reviving god, so Rupert Brooke is also the Great War soldier's model for survival—poetic survival. This leads us back to the fulcrum of Owen's revisionary Adoniasm: this wounded soldier lives on with awareness, which means that there is no chance to romanticize the death. There is no collapse into oblivion and subsequent idealization of the body and removal of the viewpoint to a more secure locus (as happens, for example, with Virgil's Adonis-figures). The boy's viewpoint coincides with ours explicitly in line 24, "he wonders why," and 43, "tonight he noticed." Both have to do with a comparison of past with present. The phrases "about this time" and "last year" also mark the hingelike movement of the poem according to a temporal metaphor—a folding-over of present onto past, involving likeness and substitution. The Adoniasm of this poem operates in memory. With him we remember the artist silly for his face, the blood-smear down his leg, the color that he and his world have lost, and the rest of it. This recalls the way Great War poets typically make the dead live on somehow, whether in the afterlife, as in Owen's "Strange Meeting," where the dead speaker finds himself in the Underworld being talked to by the German he has just killed, or in the real world, as in Robert Graves's "Not Dead," where the slain trench mate is found smiling and laughing in all of the English countryside—a quasi-Frazerism, though also to be found in the conclusion to Shelley's *Adonais* ("He is made one with Nature," etc.), where it revises *Lycidas*. Owen's "A terre" explicitly adopts this idea from *Adonais*.³⁰ Identification with another underlies this wish: immortality is especially urgent for a poet in the trenches.³¹ So many Great War poems deal with the dead as still living (most shockingly denyingly in Edgell Rickword's "Trench Poets"—about the implications of reciting Donne and Tennyson to a chum who is evidently a corpse).³² Sometimes just a simple address to the dead awakens this metaphor. The attempt to imagine annihilation seems to result in a falling back on one viewpoint or another, either reviving the dead somehow or casting into him the consciousness of the survivor: a "what if" sensibility gives rise to a play of identity. Owen's "Disabled" attests a different compromise: alive but treated as dead.

But this is also part of Owen's revision of Adonis. Adonis's subjectivity is normally suppressed in the ancient treatments; we have only a couple of short fragments in which he speaks.³³ Romantic and Decadent Adonis-figures are

pretty firmly objects, remote, gazed upon—dead lovers as Halperin sizes them up in his contribution to this volume, embodying (disembodying?) the necessity of absence and otherness for desire. Percy Lancelot Osborn's poem recommends, "Weep, weep, Alexis, for thy Corydon, / But love him more because he is not here." Adoniac nonsubjectivity, however, can be problematized under the right conditions, as with Virgil's Camilla, who alone of the *Aeneid's* Adonis-figures regains consciousness after her wounding. In Bion, Aphrodite takes over the narratology of the poem, enveloping her dead lover's viewpoint in hers to the extent that his death seems to become only the latest trope for his loss of subjectivity to her; and yet because of her assimilation to him—pressed both by her own rhetoric and by her surrogate viewpoint within the narrative—a kind of shadow Adonis emerges, her partial impersonation of him, the traces of a dialectic of identity. A grim, perverse satisfaction at his going, traceable as an anomalous element in Aphrodite's lament, can be read as an adversarial resurgence of Adonis' suppressed wishes; this grim satisfaction sometimes surfaces in the later reception, for example in Chénier's "La jeune tarentine" (which, despite its nonmythological subject, is partly modeled on Bion's poem). Narratological metaphors permit viewer and viewed to merge. "Disabled" retropes this partial identification: here, conversely, the wounded youth in whose persona we move into memory and back out into the present subsumes within himself the desirer of his past self, compensating hopelessly for the giddy jilts whose eyes pass from him. In Bion's terms, he is Aphrodite, but the Aphrodite who is also Adonis. He is not an imaginative boy, and his image of himself as object (insofar as he is doing the remembering) comes via the painter silly for his face, or his Meg, or the someone who said he'd look a god in kilts; but ultimately the failure of this compensation represents the failure of the transcendence once promised by Adonis. Owen replaces glamorous death with ghastly survival, the desirous view on a dead youth with an unflinching view on the youth as hospital-bound triple amputee—or, rather, with a double view, one on him and his own on his desirable past self. This shatters a romanticizing treatment of the English dead of the Great War and also the Romantic poetic trope on which that was founded.³⁴

I have concealed until now a wrinkle in the comparison between Bion and Owen. The Greek lines that Owen follows are corrupt; despite the attempts by Lang and other translators to make sense of them, they do not make sense, and in this part of the poem we are more logically led to a description of Aphrodite, not Adonis.³⁵ Ludolph Ahrens proposed the emendations that I accept:³⁶

ἀμφὶ δέ νιν μέλαν εἶμα παρ' ὀμφαλὸν ἄωρεῖτο,
 στήθεα δ' ἐκ χειρῶν φοινίσσετο, τοὶ δ' ὑπὸ μαζοί
 χιόνεοι τὸ πάροιθεν Ἀδώνιδι πορφύροντο.

But round her floated the dark robe at her navel; her chest was
 made scarlet by her hands; and the breasts below, snowy before,
 grew crimson for Adonis.

Shelley's 1816 translation of Bion's lines—which remarkably gives the whole description, including the wound, to Aphrodite—seems to move toward this reading, while literalizing Bion's pervasive assimilation of her suffering to that of Adonis: “the purple blood / From her struck thigh stains her white navel now, / Her bosom, and her neck before like snow.” It is noteworthy that Shelley's modern editor intrepidly emends all four pronouns to *his* in conformity with the transmitted Greek text.³⁷ The German Hellenist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff rejected Ahrens's emendations, calling the image they produce of Aphrodite rending her garment and beating her breast an “incredible error in taste” (unglaubliche Geschmacksverirrung).³⁸

What does the corruption do in Bion's poem? For one thing, it lays Adonis on his back with his thighs in the air and with the jet from his lower regions spurting all over his chest and pooling around his navel. There is no need here to pursue in detail the metaphorical possibilities of this incredible error in taste. But where Bion had an image of the mourning Aphrodite, we get an image of the dying Adonis—a perversely sexual image, belying the passive eroticism that the rest of the poem visits upon him. It is this textual corruption that provides Owen with a sort of keyhole to a different Adonis—one that consorts with his poem's emphasis on the end of sex, the loss of women's interest, and the resort to an unsatisfiable homoeroticism (reinforced by the evocations of Housman, Uranianism, and *Dorian Gray*) in a pathetically retroactive self-love. It would also not be out of place—as long as we are attending to the impulses shared and exchanged between authors, readers, and characters—to recognize in the philological imperative the same yearning that motivates the lover of the dead and to acknowledge that with unsatisfiable desire comes creative compensation (there are worse spirits in which to read the *Epitaph on Bion*). A reading of the past in and against the present is, after all, the central metaphorical and metapoetic movement of “Disabled.”³⁹

Comparison between Bion and Owen may be a slight contribution to the source criticism on Owen's poem, but says more about a tradition of remembering Bion: we are looking at an instance of the kind of themes that arise when Adonis is at issue in post-Romantic English poetry, themes that are interestingly prefigured in Bion. And these themes, and the revisionary dialectic in which they are caught up, continue in the reception of Adonis (particularly of Bion's version). The Sitwells, with Siegfried Sassoon, undertook the publication of Owen's poems after his death in battle (one week before Armistice Day). It was the Sitwells who, after the war, championed a return to Decadence; and their friend and protégé Harold Acton, leader of the postwar Oxford dandies whose avatars inhabit not a few Evelyn Waugh novels, enacts a telling reversion. His version of our lines in Bion's poem (in his "Lament for Adonis"), although it hardly represents the exuberance of his translation ("Small jewelled nipples, bleed!"), will make the point:⁴⁰

But round his navel leaps the thick dark blood,
His chest is lapped in scarlet from the thighs,
Now purpled are those limbs afore as white
As veils of snow unflecked by merest breeze.

The ornateness and imagery go back to the 1890s and their inheritance from Keats, Swinburne, and the Symbolists, and the retrogression in ideas, from the standpoint of Owen's treatment, matches that of the style. Acton declines to pursue Adonis' subjectivity; "lapped" is empty of sexual energy—it has more to do with swathing and embowering—and his Adonis remains a gorgeous aesthetic object ("And from his thigh of milk-white agate gashed, / Slit by the cruel tusk, / The ruby blood drips down his skin of snow"). If Acton's *Adonis* is not exactly about daffodils in the meadow turning their cheeks to be kissed by the wind, nevertheless, to put it one way, the glow-lamps are definitely budding again in the light blue trees.

NOTES

1. I wish to thank Basil Dufallo for guiding my fragile bark from the quiet waters of the Meles and the Tiber toward the stormy billows of Ocean. Owen 1983, 175–76.
2. Lang 1892. Hibberd (1986, 113–14) notices the connection; Owen himself bought a copy of Lang in December of 1917 (Hibberd 1986, 219, n. 32). On Bion in general see Reed 1997.

3. The *Epitaph on Bion* was formerly attributed to Bion's forerunner, Moschus of Syracuse (mid-second century BCE), a misapprehension that persists in some quarters.

4. Reed 2004.

5. Bion, *Adonis*, 10–11: ὑπ' ὀφρύσι δ' ὄμματα ναρκῆ, / καὶ τὸ ρόδον φεύγει τῷ χεῖλεος. Lang's "wax heavy and dim" would be rendered more literally as "grow numb."

6. *Aeneid*, 11.818–19: *labitur exsanguis, labuntur frigida leto / lumina, purpureus quondam color ora reliquit.*

7. On the war poets' appropriation of the Classical imagery of "purple flowers" (poppies and roses above all), see Fussell 1975, 243–50, 265.

8. Owen 1983, 123.

9. "The Critic as Artist," in Wilde 1931, 120. Another Greek gem carved with the figure of Adonis appears in Wilde's "The Young King" (1931, 101); on this latter, see Bartlett 1988, 32.

10. Housman's poem (and all of *A Shropshire Lad*) is much in evidence in Great War poetry, particularly as a homoerotic resource: see the preface to Taylor 1989, *passim*. See also Fussell 1975, 281–83 (and 292–93 on the debt to Housman in "Disabled").

11. Bion's own phrasing follows a simile at *Iliad*, 4.141–47 that compares Menelaus' bloodied thigh to a valuable ivory object, "laid up as a gaud (ἄγαλμα) for a king," colored with purple dye by women of the East. From this literary-historical perspective Owen simultaneously restores to Bion's image its martial and aesthetic value.

12. See quotations above. The lines are quoted in Fussell 1975, 285. On Rolfe and William of Norwich in this context, cf. Smith 1970, 66, 75; Hanson 1997, 337–39. Tuzet (1987, 224–35), in a chapter on Adonis in Decadent literature, identifies D'Annunzio's *Martyre de Saint Sebastien* as a Decadent reflex of the Adonis myth.

13. It was published in the *Universal Review*, November 1889. Stanza VIII contains the line, partly repeated by Osborn, "And Corydon is gone beyond recall." Both Corydon and Thyrsis are names found in Theocritean and Virgilian pastoral.

14. Bion, *Ad.* 1–2: Αἰάζω τὸν Ἀδωνιν, ἀπώλετο καλὸς Ἀδωνις. / ὥλετο καλὸς Ἀδωνις, ἐπαιάζουσιν Ἑρωτες (the poem's "refrain" repeats elements of this opening). On Osborn and his relation to Uranian poetry, see Smith 1970, 51.

15. Owen 1983, 181.

16. Hibberd 1986, 33, 37, 83, 161.

17. Najarian 2002, 181–83.

18. Owen 1967, 187.

19. In this connection, we should not forget the Adonis episode in Keats's own *Endymion* 2.387–587, which seems especially to have exercised the young Owen's sensual receptivities (Hibberd 2002, 55–56). Wilde calls Keats "fair as Sebastian, and as early slain" in "The Grave of Keats"—whose first published title, "Heu Miserande Puer" (a quotation of *Aeneid*, 6.882 and partly of 10.825 and 11.42) assimilates Keats to three of Virgil's Adonis-figures; see Wilde 2000, 236.

20. Owen 1983, 99.

21. *Ibid.*, 103.

22. See Taylor 1989 and Fussell 1975, chap. 8. Haggerty (2004, 393–94) connects Bion with later elegy, particularly Shelley and Whitman, in this regard. This sort of appreciation of wounded or dead soldier goes back to the American Civil War; see Royster 1991, 250–51.

23. Comer 1996, 12–13, cf. 54–55.

24. Fussell 1975, 291–99.

25. Hibberd 1986, 158.

26. On biblical sacrifice as a theme here, see Hibberd 1986, 190. Bergonzi (1965, 123–24) notes its presence in Owen and other Great War poets.

27. Owen 1983, 535.

28. Fussell 1988, 186–210.

29. Austen 1919, reprinted in Taylor 1989, 20.

30. Najarian 2002, 181–82.

31. I think also of the Romantic idea of a personal double, particularly with Hibberd's reading of "Strange Meeting" (1986, 166–79).

32. Rickword 1991, 16. These lines especially suggest the pertinence of the poem to the topic of the present volume: "But you could tell he was far gone, / for he lay gaping, mackerel-eyed, / and stiff and senseless as a post / even when that old poet cried / 'I long to talk with some old lover's ghost.'"

33. Praxilla, fr. 747 Page; Dionysius I of Syracuse, fr. 1 Snell (in the latter, he is not certainly, but very plausibly, the speaker).

34. The closing lines "Why don't they come and put him into bed? Why don't they come?" effectively reduce Bion's trope of death as sleep back to literal sleep (Owen's own "Asleep"—preceded by Rimbaud's "Le dormeur du val"—explores the same trope).

35. See Reed 1992. Note that Lang's "leapt forth" (cf. Owen's "spurred") is based on a sixteenth-century emendation (perhaps by Xylander) of manuscript ἤρωεῖτο το ἤρωεῖτο at the end of line 25 (the latter verb is used of spurting blood at *Iliad*, 1.303 and *Odyssey*, 16.441).

36. Ahrens 1854, ad loc.; he was partly anticipated by Graefe (1815, 118).

37. See Rogers in Shelley 1975, 93, 359. Shelley's interpretation might have been prompted by Graefe, if not by his own scrutiny of the Greek (evidently in Valckenaer's edition: see Peck 1921).

38. Wilamowitz 1900, 41.

39. Cf. Brown's contribution to the present volume. Bartlett 1988 has to be the most searching exploration, in connection with our topics, of the problems and possibilities of reading the past in and against the present.

40. Acton 1925, 9.

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Embracing the Corpse

NECROPHILIC TENDENCIES IN PETRARCH

Alison Cornish

FRANCESCO PETRARCA'S IDEA OF ROME and his love of Laura are the two great, parallel passions of his literary production. They underlie twin aspects of his carefully constructed public persona. As humanist contemplative, Petrarch engaged in imitating, and thereby resurrecting, Latin antiquity; as vernacular rhymster, he polished a set of lyrical fragments that together represent or recollect the absent and finally departed beloved lady. Canzone 53 of the *Rerum vulgarium fragmenta*, "*Spirto gentil*," is one poetic locus where the two preoccupations intersect. Among the few political poems in the *Canzoniere*, "*Spirto gentil*" is remarkable for its integration of erotic language consistent with the main theme of the collection. The poem's narrator expresses admiration for the poem's male addressee in terms that recall the old erotic topos of *amor de lonh*, claiming he has fallen in love with him from a distance.¹ This unnamed addressee, the gentle spirit, is exhorted to act out the narrator's own violent erotic fantasy of pulling the old lady of Rome by the hair. Taking violent possession of the beloved is eccentric to the usually passive attitude of the weeping Petrarchan lover. The revival of Rome requires the will to dominate, whereas the love of Laura demands humility, fear, pallor, servitude. Yet the similarity between these two loves, which I would like to explore here, is in an underlying morbid eroticism, the uncanny allure of scattered remains and lifeless body parts.

This macabre aspect of the lover's carnal obsession with Laura, idealized in the gemlike verses of the *rime sparse*, is made explicit in the Latin prose of the book called the *Secretum*, in which Petrarch stages (or reports) a nocturnal dialogue over the state of his soul between himself and Saint Augustine. Although Franciscus claims that his love was always honorable, with nothing foul or obscene about it, Augustinus collapses the distinction between dirty women and the divine Laura by focusing on how her stupendous body must be exhausted by illness and frequent childbirth and is anyway destined to become a corpse. He

predicts that Franciscus will be ashamed, when he sees that corpse, of having exalted its qualities and bound his immortal soul to such a fragile little body.²

It is the Augustinus of this text who also interprets the “real” significance of Laura’s name as comprising not just poetic aspiration to the laurel crown but also a repressed will to power—the laurels of Caesar. The culmination of Petrarch’s delirium, the “insanity of his deranged mind,” was his cult of the laurel merely because it reminded him of the splendor of Laura’s name.³ While cynical literary critics, beginning with Petrarch’s close friend, Giacomo Colonna, as we shall see in a moment, imagine that the poet invented the woman with the suggestive name to express his true ambitions, the ghostly Augustinus says the opposite: it is only because of Laura’s name that Petrarch so loved the laurels both of emperors and of poets. For that reason, virtually no poem has issued from his pen that did not make some mention of that plant. But in the end, since it was not lawful for him to covet the imperial laurel crown, he craved that of poets with no less modesty than he lusted after the woman herself.⁴

In one of Petrarch’s letters, we find that another (perhaps more “real”) interlocutor, Giacomo Colonna, had accused him of inventing the splendid name of Laura so that it might be not only something for him to speak about but also a reason for many people to speak about him.⁵ It is not, therefore, Laura who inspired the love of poetry but the craving for poetic fame that made him invent Laura. The real Laura in Petrarch’s heart is nothing but the desired laurels, witnessed by his long and untiring study.⁶ The love of the woman, then, is but a metaphor. She is wholly invented, his poems are fictitious, and his sighs are simulated.⁷ Equally invented, implies Giacomo, is Petrarch’s professed desire to visit Rome and see his old friend. Deceived by this fiction, Giacomo has waited for him there in vain.⁸

Petrarch’s answer to this charge is an eloquent encomium of Rome, so that Giacomo might understand that the poet has no small desire to look upon the queen of cities, whom he has never seen, like someone with whom one falls in love from a distance, because of the innumerable things he has read and written already about her.⁹ He desires to see that city, even though what there is to see there is really not very splendid at all, a deserted and pale effigy of what she used to be.¹⁰ Petrarch wants to go to Rome to see the faces of beloved and esteemed people, in the first place Giacomo’s, then those of his father, his brothers, and his sisters, but also the greatly desired faces of friends.¹¹ Rome, too, has a face, which he longs to see.

The physical attractions of that venerable old lady are her walls, hills, river, and monuments.¹² A gigantic tomb, the ruined city bears the remnants of great Roman citizens, in particular the bones of Scipio, but also the ashes, blood, bones, and tombs of Christian martyrs. How sweet it is for a Christian spirit to see the city make heaven reside on earth, joined with the sinews and bones of the holy martyrs and sprinkled with the precious blood of the witnesses of the truth. How sweet it is to see the venerable image of the savior and in the hard stone the footprints that will be adored eternally by different peoples. How sweet it is to walk around the tombs of the saints, wander through the atria of the apostles.¹³ The letter protests the authenticity of Petrarch's love of Rome by evoking the sensual pleasures, which he has never experienced but can imagine, of seeing (*cernere, videre*) and physically encircling and exploring it (*circuire, vagari*).

In the Roman poem "*Spirto gentil*," the walls of the city are also described as the object of amorous veneration.

L'antiche mura, ch'ancor teme et ama
E trema 'l mondo, quando si rimembra
Del tempo andato e'n dietro si rivolge;
E i sassi dove fûr chiuse le membra
Di tai che non saranno senza fama . . .
(*Rime* 53.29–33)

The ancient walls that the world still fears and loves and trembles
at when it remembers the time gone by and turns back. And the
stones wherein were closed the limbs of those who will not be
without fame. . . .

The walls of the city and the stones that once entombed the *membra*, the bodies of famous citizens, make the world fear, love, and tremble, just as do the *membra* of the beautiful lady in the rest of the poems of the *Canzoniere*. For example, in the madrigal just preceding "*Spirto gentil*," the sight of Laura's veil makes him tremble all over with a chill of love: *tutto tremar d'un amoroso gelo* (*Rime* 52.8). Laura's outer covering, her limbs, her veil, her physical appearance, have the same effect on the lover that the walls and relics of Rome have on the world in general, and on Petrarch in particular.

The song about Rome of necessity focuses on the act of remembering, of turning to look at time gone past (*Rime* 53.30–33: *quando si rimembra / Del tempo*

andato e'n dietro si rivolge [when it remembers the time gone by and turns back]), just as do the lyrics about Laura (*Rime* 298.1: *Quand'io mi volgo in dietro a mirar gli anni* [When I turn back to look at the years]; *Rime* 126.5: *Con sospir mi rimembra* [with a sigh, I remember]). Both acts of recollection involve the conceit of *remembering*, or recomposing scattered parts, which Nancy Vickers pointed out as one of the principle topoi of the *rime sparse*. Several critics have called attention to the parallel between the professed fragmentary nature of these “fragmented” or “scattered” rhymes, which taken together are meant to constitute the coherent whole of the lover’s experience, from the beginning to the end of his love—and the ruins of Rome, which are deplorably fragmentary but from which one can reconstruct an idealized picture of the ancient city. As Marguerite Waller put it, “Laura, as the desired center of the lover’s existence, manifests the same inadequacies as Rome, taken as the center of human history. She is mortal and she is absent.”¹⁴ Janet Smarr observed that, “unable to create a Rome politically, Petrarch did his best to evoke its existence in his verse” and that the death of Laura is really an allusion to the failure of his political dreams.¹⁵

Canzone 53 is an exhortation to an unnamed individual, invoked as “gentle spirit” to effect a reconstruction or resurrection of the city through a determined act of heterosexual aggression. Since the sixteenth century, it was commonly assumed to refer to Cola di Rienzo, who was much encouraged by the poet in his revolutionary attempt to wrest power from the city’s noble families and reestablish a government by the people of Rome in 1347. Yet the poem is more hopeful than celebratory and therefore cannot be referring to that revolution when it had already taken place. The title of “signor” and the epithet “gentile” would be unsuitable for Cola, son of a tavern keeper, whom Petrarch had, moreover, met personally in 1343, whereas the poem claims that its author has never seen its addressee (*Rime* 53.102: *un che non ti vide ancor da presso* [one who never yet saw you close up]). This would also exclude Stefano Colonna the Younger, whom Giosuè Carducci favored as the addressee of the poem, since, although he was elected a Roman senator in 1342, Petrarch had met him in 1337. Since no historical individual seems identifiable as the poem’s addressee, he may be yet another of the poet’s fictions—an ideal hoped for but never attained. Some have claimed that the label “*spirto gentil*” could not possibly refer to men of action at all, but only to literary men, clerics, saints, contemplative men—or women.¹⁶

Indeed, the expression recalls, in particular, the description of Laura as a saint in heaven in a sonnet that appears much later in the collection.

Spirto felice che sì dolcemente
Volgei quelli occhi più chiari che'l sole (*Rime* 352.1–2).

Happy spirit that so sweetly turned those eyes brighter than the
sun.

In this poem, Petrarch recalls that the happy spirit moved Laura's feet through the violets and grass and then abandoned that body on earth in order to take up the sweet veil allotted to it by high destiny (*Rime* 352.10–11: *quel soave velo / che per alto destin ti venne in sorte*). The vital spirit is distinguished from the various costumes it inhabits at different times—the mortal body while alive, the veil of beatitude after death. The spirit commands the limbs, which in turn are described as a temporary lodging for spirit, soul, or intellect. In other poems, Laura's body is described as a lovely inn (*bell'albergo*) for her "gentle soul" (*Rime* 251.13, 127.35). In the *Secretum*, Augustinus accuses the poet of having loved Laura's corporeal form, the least of all beauties (*Secretum* 148: *cum tamen ultima pulcritudinum sit forma corporea*). Franciscus protests that he would have loved her beautiful soul even if it had had a deformed residence (*habitaculum*)—provided that beauty could have appeared to his eyes.¹⁷

It is this conceit of a noble soul inhabiting beautiful limbs, taken from the erotic context of the rest of the *Canzoniere*, that governs much of the rhetoric of canzone 53. It is not at all clear, however, whether the limbs (*quelle membra*) ruled by the gentle spirit are physical human body parts, the limbs of the man addressed by the poem, or the metaphorical limbs of the city of Rome presently inhabited by this worthy pilgrim-gentleman. The poem begins:

Spirto gentil che quelle membra reggi
Dentro a le qua' peregrinando alberga
Un signor valoroso accorto e saggio
(*Rime* 53.1–3)

Gentle spirit who rules those limbs in which a traveling lord,
valorous, attentive, and wise, is lodging.

The epithet, "spirto gentil," identifies what the city has lost but now may finally regain: a spirit to animate those beautiful *membra*, those walls, those ruins, those relics. The city is, then, like a dead body that needs to be resurrected, to

be made beautiful again: *Roma mia sarà ancor bella* (*Rime* 53.42). The city's body, as in the letter to Giacomo, is made up of its ruined walls and buildings and the blood, ashes, and bones of the ancient Romans and Christian martyrs who lived and died there. She is lacking in those beautiful souls that placed her where she was.

Passato è già piú che 'l millesim' anno
 Che 'n lei mancâr quell' anime leggiadre
 Che locata l'avean là dov'ell'era
 (*Rime* 53.77–79)

More than the thousandth year has already passed since in her
 have gone missing those lovely souls that had placed here where
 she was.

Those souls are now divided between heaven and hell. If word of this new hope should descend down under (*la giù*, that is, into hell) it would have the power to please and even make happy the damned spirits of great Romans.

O grandi Scipïoni, o fedel Bruto,
 Quanto v'aggrada, s'egli è ancor venuto
 Romor là giù del ben locato officio!
 Come cre' che Fabrizio
 Si faccia lieto, udendo la novella!
 E dice: Roma mia sarà ancor bella.
 (*Rime* 53.37–42)

O great Scipios, o loyal Brutus, how it must please you, if the
 rumor of the well-placed office is yet arrived down there. How I
 believe Fabricius will be gladdened when he hears the news!

And, if any earthly thing at all should concern the citizens of heaven, who have abandoned their bodies here, they are surely begging the gentle spirit to put an end to civil strife.

Et, se cosa di qua nel ciel si cura,
 L'anime, che là su son cittadine,

Et hanno i corpi abandonati in terra,
Del lungo odio civil ti pregan fine.

(*Rime* 53.43–46)

And if in heaven there is concern for anything down here, the
souls who are citizens up there and have abandoned their bodies
on earth are praying you to put an end to the long civil hatred.

These souls have all left the corpse that is Rome. The gentle spirit is called
upon, therefore, to revive her—either by entering into those abandoned limbs
and ruling them or by taking hold of the personified city in a vigorous embrace.
The poet fantasizes about having his own hands entwined in her hair and ex-
horts the *spirto gentil* to take “old, lazy, slow” Italy into his arms, shake her up,
grab her by the hair, and pull her out of the mud.

Che s’aspetti non so né che s’agogni
Italia, che suoi guai non par che senta,
Vecchia oziosa e lenta.
Dormirà sempre, e non fia chi la svegli?
Le man l’avess’io avvolto entro’ capegli.

...

Pon man in quella venerabil chioma
Securamente e ne le trecce sparte,
Sí che la neghittosa esca del fango.

(*Rime* 53.10–23)

What she is waiting for I do not know, nor for what Italy is
struggling, who does not seem to hear her woes. Old, lazy, and
slow: will she always sleep and will there be no one to awaken her?
Had I my hands entwined in her hair. . . . Put your hands securely
into those venerable locks and the disheveled tresses, so that the
negligent woman gets out of the mud.

The starkly ungenteel erotic language of this canzone has its primary vernac-
ular model in Dante’s experimental poem “*Così nel mio parlar voglio esser aspro*,” in
which the poet-lover contemplates violent revenge on the coldhearted lady. In
particular, the fantasy of grasping the lady by the hair is reminiscent of Dante’s

"*S'io avessi le belle trecce prese*" (If I had taken the beautiful tresses).¹⁸ Yet Petrarch also had classical analogues for the detail of hair pulling, such as the horrible episode in book 2 of Virgil's *Aeneid*, where Pyrrhus winds his hand into Priam's hair before killing him (*Aeneid* 2.552: *implicuitque comam laeva*) even as the king slips in the blood of his son—this king, soon to become a headless trunk lying on the shore, a corpse without a name (*Aeneid* 2.557–58: *iacet ingens litore truncus, / avolsumque umeris caput et sine nomine corpus*).

The opening line of Petrarch's poem, *Spirto gentil che quelle membra reggi*, is also an echo of Aeneas's parting words to Dido: "Nor shall my memory of Elissa be bitter, while I have memory of myself, and while breath still sways these limbs" (Virgil, *Aeneid*, 4.335–36: *nec me meminisse pigebit Elissae / dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus*). From that scene Petrarch could also have gotten the very notion of comparing sexual love to love of a city: *hic patria, haec amor est* (that is my country, that is my love [*Aeneid*, 4.348]).

There are also numerous echoes of Lucan's *Civil War*, all from book 2, where Lucan gives his portrait of the virtuous statesman, Cato "Uticensis." In particular, Petrarch's characterization of the *spirto gentil* as husband and father (*Rime* 53.82: *Tu marito, tu padre*) is modeled on Lucan's *urbi pater est urbique maritus* (*Civil War*, 2.388). An analogue that has not to my knowledge been pointed out between book 2 of the *Civil War* and Petrarch's poem is, however, another passage, in which Cato describes his stoic desire to share Rome's bitter destiny, to embrace (he says) the city's cadaver, her name of liberty, and to have pursued her vain shadow—much as Petrarch vowed to pursue the shadow of the laurel (*Rime* 30.16: *seguirò l'ombra di quel dolce lauro* [cf. 23.109]).¹⁹

In his seminal book *The Light in Troy*, Thomas Greene wrote that the imagery of exhumation was the central metaphor of the archaeological, philological, and imitative impulses of the Renaissance.²⁰ More recently, Leonard Barkan has discussed how the literal unearthing of antique, fragmented statuary in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries made real and concrete what had in Petrarch's time been a purely symbolic and presumably unattainable idea of Roman space.²¹ Greene traces Petrarch's most complete imaginary reconstruction of Rome in his letter to Giovanni Colonna di San Vito, where he describes their promenades through the ancient city (*Familiari* 1.4, 24–27). Although in this letter, unlike in the one addressed to another member of the Colonna family, Giacomo, discussed earlier, Petrarch has indeed at last visited the city, his description of it is no less invented, based on his reading rather than his walking. Greene proposes that the Renaissance fantasy of "digging up" antiquity

contained both a downward impulse into the hidden secrets of the earth and the past and an “upward impulse to bring forth a corpse whole and newly restored.”²² Of canzone 53, Greene observed that the “allusions to an underworld of heroes and metaphoric portraits of a stupefied or widowed Rome waiting to be revived, contain in germ the full-blown necromantic imagery of the later Renaissance.”²³ When this necromancy, or conjuring of corpses, is couched within the erotic language of the *Canzoniere*, however, what results might be called, more precisely, necrophilia. It is not just a question of pulling up and resurrecting the corpse but of embracing it with the fervor of a lover.

The necrophilic twist of the political canzone 53 finds an interesting, more literal parallel in another of Petrarch's letters, written to another member of the Colonna family, Cardinal Giovanni, Giacomo's elder brother and Petrarch's early patron. In this letter (to which is assigned the date 1333 but which Billanovich²⁴ believes is wholly fictional), Petrarch provides a good example of how travel narrows one. His wanderings through France and Germany to the shores of the Rhine, even though they show him magnificent things, make him happy to have been born Italian.²⁵ From his visit to Charlemagne's residence at Aachen, as a French nationalist writing a hundred years later would put it, all he got was a shameful little story, which he claimed he heard from the monks who care for the temple that houses the emperor's tomb.²⁶

The story goes that King Charles, whom the Germans arrogantly give the epithet of Magnus (as if he had been the equal of Pompey or Alexander) fell hopelessly in love with a common woman (*muliercula*—a term used for Laura in the *Secretum* 142), with whose embraces he was so obsessed that he neglected affairs of state. When the young woman suddenly died, great joy, although hidden, was felt throughout the kingdom—joy that turned to horror when it became apparent that the king was suffering a far more serious and squalid sickness than simple lust. Charlemagne had the obscene and bloodless body embalmed and dressed in purple and jewels and continued to caress it with fond embrace.²⁷

Fortunately there was at that time a good bishop of Cologne, who obtained from God through tearful prayer the secret of the king's demented passion.²⁸ The bishop sneaks into the chamber where the corpse is kept, slips his finger under its cold and rigid tongue, and pulls out a ring with a small gem.²⁹ Charlemagne, readying himself for his usual desired embrace of the dead woman, instantly becomes thoroughly disgusted by his favorite cadaver, ordering that it be buried immediately, and suddenly conceives a terrible fondness

for the bishop.³⁰ The good cleric, just and wise, thought it would be better to free himself from an “enviable but dangerous burden” and, fearing that the ring might fall into the wrong hands or, being destroyed, would hurt the king, he threw it into a nearby swamp.³¹

This is how the site of Aquisgrana (Aachen or Aix-la-Chapelle), where Petrarch heard the story and where he claims to have written the letter, became the permanent residence of the king. The swamp became his favorite thing in the world; he used to sit by it, enjoying its odor, as if it were most sweet. There he transferred his court, and in the middle of the muddy marsh he laid the foundations of his palace and temple so that no human or divine responsibility could ever call him away from that place. There he passed the rest of his life, and there he was buried, after having ordered that his successors be crowned and begin their rule there. This custom lives still, Petrarch concludes, and will live so long as a German hand holds the reins of the Roman empire.³²

The story has a moral: first, that love and governing are incompatible, for it goes without saying how discordant and evil is the shared condition of lover and king. For what is ruling but a just and glorious domination? On the contrary, what is love but a filthy and unjust servitude?³³ The little story, however dubious, distasteful, and incredible, also fits into Petrarch’s political agenda, which is emphatically nationalistic: Germans should not hold the reins of empire. The swamp of Aachen is, as it were, the same mud into which the personified Italy of “*Spirto gentil*” has fallen. The vulgarity of the story, like the uncourtly behavior recommended to the gentle spirit addressed in the poem in order to revive the tired old lady of Italy, underscores the ignominiousness of Rome’s present condition. Charlemagne became enamored of a swamp, and Rome fell into the mud of oblivion.

That the corpse of the beloved stands in for the ruins of Rome is suggested by the fact that, in another version of the legend, Charlemagne, while hunting in the area of Aquisgrana, accidentally exposed some remnants of some Roman baths built by Granus, the brother of Nero and Agrippa. Attracted by the magnificence of these ruins and the salutary effect of the waters, he built in that place his favorite residence.³⁴

The story about Charlemagne’s morbid obsession for a dead woman is a grotesque literalization of the love for dead ladies—a tradition in Italian vernacular poetry at least since Dante—but also of carnal love itself, which, from the perspective of Christianity (vocalized by Augustinus in Petrarch’s own *Secretum*), should indeed disgust us, since the bodies we love are but mortal,

prone to death and decay. At the same time, it is precisely the Christian interpretation of Roman topography that makes the scattered limbs of dead people, as well as of the dead city, a noble object of ardent veneration. As Jennifer Summit has recently argued, the medieval view of the city valorized “a network of subterranean or interstitial spaces that represent the obverse of the classical city.”³⁵ The cult of Rome is necessarily the cult of dead bodies, abominable to the pagans. With the conversion of the city to Christianity, these cadavers, or their fragments, were brought above ground and transported from the suburban catacombs to temples inside the city walls, transforming those temples, and the city, into a tomb. The necrophilia implicit in the political exhortation of “*Spirto gentil*,” and explicit in the political joke of the fable about Charlemagne are not the “antipodes of Petrarch’s sublime devotion to Laura after her death,” as Robert Morrissey recently put it, but rather its underlying reality.³⁶ The love of Laura is, after all, the love of mortality. And, however much Rome is wished renewed and renovated, it is really those dead bones, those scattered members, that permit the poet to reconstruct the ideal city, to identify himself with imperial glory, and to win thereby the laurel.

NOTES

1. Rime 53.103: *se non come per fama uom s’innamora*; Mazzotta 1993, 139.
2. *Secretum* 138: *cum effigiem morte variatam et pallentia membra conspexeris, pudebit animum immortalem caduco applicuisse corpusculo . . . et omnis dies ad mortem propius accedit, et corpus illud egregium, morbis ac crebris partibus exhaustum, multum pristini vigoris amisit*; *Secretum* 142: *quod in amore meo nichil unquam turpe, nichil obscenam fuerit, nichil denique, preter magnitudinem, culpabile*.
3. *Secretum* 158: *Aut—ut omnium delirationum tuarum supremum culmen attingam et, quod paulo ante comminatus sum, peragam—quis digne satis excretur aut stupeat hanc alienate mentis insaniam cum, non minus nominis quam ipsius corporis splendore captus, quicquid illi consonum fuit incredibili vanitate coluisti?*
4. *Secretum* 158: *Quam ob causam tanto opere sive cesaream sive poeticam lauream, quod illa hoc nomine vocaretur, adamasti; ex eoque tempore sine lauri mentione vix ullum tibi carmen effluxit . . . Denique quia cesaream sperare fas non erat, lauream poeticam, quam studiorum tuorum tibi meritum promittebat, nichilo modestius quam dominam ipsam adamaveras concupisti*.
5. *Familiari* 2.9, 94: *Quid ergo ais? finxisse me michi speciosum Lauree nomen, ut esset et de qua ego loquerer et propter loqueretur quam de me multi loquerentur*.
6. *Familiari* 2.9, 94: *re autem in animo meo Lauream nichil esse, nisi illam forte poeticam, ad quam aspirare me longum et indefessum studium testatur*.
7. *Familiari* 2.9, 94: *de hac autem spirante Lauree, cuius forma captus videor, manufacta esse omnia, ficta carmina, simulata suspiria*.
8. *Familiari* 2.9, 95: *Quis autem erit facetiarum modus? ubi desines? quid ais? tentatum te quoque fictionibus meis ac prope delusum, imo vero delusum, aliquandiu expectasse me Rome, simulantem ingens veniendi teque revidendi desiderium*.

9. *Familiari* 2.9, 96: *ut intelligeres non parvipendere me regine urbis aspectum, de qua infinita perlegi et ipse multa iam scripsi.*

10. *Familiari* 2.9, 96: *Credi non posset quantum urbem illam, desertam quamvis et veteris effigiem Rome, spectare cupiam, quam nunquam vidi.*

11. *Familiari* 2.9, 95–96: *Cesset quamvis ardor faciem tuam videndi . . . quiescat affectus cernendi preclarissimum patrem tuum, magnanimos fratres, honestissimas sorores, exoptatos amicorum vultus.*

12. *Familiari* 2.9, 96: *quanti demum extimaturum reris menia Urbis et colles et, ut ait Virgilius, 'tuscum Tyberim et romana palatia' cernere?*

13. *Familiari* 2.9, 96: *quam dulce tamen est cristiano animo urbem cernere celi instar in terris, sacro-sanctis martirum nervis atque ossibus consertam et veri testium preciosa cede respersam; videre verendam populis Salvatoris imaginem et in saxo durissimo eternum gentibus adoranda vestigia . . . circuire sanctorum tumulos, vagari per Apostolorum atria.*

14. Waller 1980, 21.

15. Smarr 1982, 135.

16. Chiorboli 1930, 128.

17. *Secretum* 148: *at si oculis appareret, amarem profecto pulcritudinem animi deforme licet habentis habitaculum.*

18. Dante 1965, 46–66.

19. Lucan 1997 (*The Civil War*), 2.301–303: *non ante revellar/ Exanimem quam te complectar, Roma; tuumque/ Nomen, Libertas, et inanem prosequar umbram.*

20. Greene 1982, 41.

21. Barkan 1999, 20–25.

22. Greene 1982, 41.

23. *Ibid.*, 92.

24. Billanovich 1947, 51–52.

25. *Familiari* 1.4, 24: *Et licet multa utrobique magnifica viderim, me tamen italice originis non penitet; imo, ut verum fatear, quo latius peregrinor, eo maior natalis soli subit admiratio.*

26. Morrissey 1997, 165.

27. *Familiari* 1.4, 26: *Cuius rei ingens primum in regia, sed latens, gaudium fuit; deinde dolor tantum priore gravior, quantum fediori morbo correptum regis animum videbant; cuius nec morte lenitus furor, sed in ipsum obscenum cadaver et exangue translatus est, quod balsamo et aromatibus conditum, bonustum gemmis et velatum purpura diebus ac noctibus tam miserabili quam cupido fovebat amplexu.*

28. *Familiari* 1.4, 26: *Erat ea tempestate in aula coloniensis antistes, vir, ut memorant, sanctitate et sapientia clarus, necnon comitatus et consilii regii prima vox; qui domini sui statum miseratus, ubi animadvertit humanis remediis nichil agi, ad Deus versus, illum assidue precari, in illo spem reponere, ab eo finem male poscere multo cum gemitu. Quod cum diu fecisset nec desiturus videretur, die quodam illustri miraculo recreatus est; siquidem, ex more sacrificanti et post devotissimas preces pectus et aram lacrimis implenti, de celo vox insonuit: sub extincte mulieris lingua furoris regii causam latere.*

29. *Quo letior, mox, peracto sacrificio, ad locum ubi corpus erat se proripuit et iure notissime familiaritatis regie introgressus, os digito clam scrutatus, gemmam perexiguo anulo inclusam sub gelida rigentique lingua repertam festinabundus avexit.*

30. *Nec multo post rediens Carolus et ex consuetudine ad optatum mortue congressum properans, repente aridi cadaveris spectaculo concussus, obriguit exhorruitque contactum, auferri eam quantotius ac*

sepeliri iubens. Inde totus in antistitem conversus, illum amare, illum colere, illum in die arctius amplecti, denique nichil nisi ex sententia illius agere, ab illo nec diebus nec noctibus avelli.

31. *Quod ubi sensit vir iustus ac prudens, optabilem forte multis sed honerosam sibi sarcinam abicere statuit; veritusque ne si vel ad manus alterius perveniret vel flammis consumeretur, domino suo aliquid periculi, afferret, anulum in vicine paludis prealtam voraginem demersit.*

32. *Familiari 1.4, 27: Aquis forte tum rex cum proceribus suis habitabat; ex eoque tempore cunctis civitatibus sedes illa prelata est. In ea, nil sibi palude gratius; ibi assidere, illis aquis uti mira cum voluptate, illius odore veluti suavissimo delectari. Postremo illus regiam suam transtulit et in medio palustris limi immenso sumptu iactis molibus, palatium templumque construxit, ut nichil divine vel humane rei eum inde abstraheret. Postremo ibi vite sue reliquum egit, ibique sepultus est, cauto prius ut successores sui primam inde coronam et prima imperii auspicia capesserent. Quod hodieque servatur servabiturque quandiu romani frena imperii thetonica manus aget.*

33. *Dici nequit quam discors et quam male se compassura conditio est amantis ac regis; nunquam profecto contraria sine lite iunguntur. Quid est autem regnum nisi iusta et gloriosa dominatio? contra, quid est amor nisi feda servitus et iniusta?*

34. Paris 1896, 719.

35. Summit 2000, 225.

36. Morrissey 1997, 165.

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Orpheus after Eurydice

(ACCORDING TO ALBRECHT DÜRER)

Helmut Puff

AT ITS CORE, THE MYTH OF ORPHEUS AND EURYDICE is a tale of survival. Orpheus, the bard, outlived his beloved wife, Eurydice. In fact, he lost her twice, once to the deadly bite of a snake and a second time to his own gaze. Deeply grieved by her first death, Orpheus descended into the underworld to reclaim Eurydice. The gods, moved by his singing, permitted him to take her back, on the condition, however, that during the couple's passage back to the earth he was not allowed to look at her. Unable to restrain his gaze, Orpheus turned and, to great woe, lost Eurydice forever.

It is here where many tellings of the myth leave off—at the height of tragic loss, a moment well suited to celebrate love between the sexes beyond the grave as well as the power of the arts to transcend death. And it is here where I would like to begin: What ever happened to Orpheus after Eurydice? Unlike those lucky lovers who are united in death, Orpheus continued to live, separated by his own life from his dead lover—a survival that perpetuated his unhappy fate. Pausanias (second century AD), that sensible antiquarian among the ancients, is the odd one out on this myth, relating, among other endings, that Orpheus “killed himself for grief,” thus mending the story's sentimental shortcoming, Orpheus's survival, and reuniting the lovers in death.¹

The imprint of Eurydice's “double death” (*gemina nece*, X.64), to quote Ovid (43 BC–17 AD),² on Orpheus's life after Eurydice's death is what interests me here. Nowhere does her hold on his life become more apparent than in tellings of Orpheus's own death, a death that reflects, inverts, and reinterprets the story of Eurydice's own. This focus on Orpheus after Eurydice skirts the question most frequently asked with regard to our myth (Why did he turn back?) and shifts the focus to: How did he continue to live (and die)?³

In particular, I will explore one motif, “Orpheus the first bugger.”⁴ I have borrowed this formulation from Albrecht Dürer (1471–1528), the German



Fig. 5.1. Albrecht Dürer, "The Death of Orpheus" (1494).
bpk/Hamburger Kunsthalle/Christoph Irrgang.

Renaissance artist from Nuremberg. Dürer's drawing of 1494, on which this inscription appears, will guide my descent into the maze of myths associated with Orpheus. "Orpheus the first bugger" provides a myth against the grain of an Orpheus we seem to know so well. How Orpheus, the lover of boys, complicates and challenges a host of other understandings—Orpheus the pacifier,

Orpheus *theologus*, Orpheus the archpoet—and how it coexisted with tellings that turned Orpheus into an exemplar of virtue, eloquence, and art shall be the focus of my tale.

Dürer's Death of Orpheus

Albrecht Dürer's drawing of 1494 depicts a moment of great violence, the slaying of Orpheus by women.⁵ The image is one of female cruelty: two women stand erect above a crouching, nearly naked man. The figures' dangerous frenzy is expressed primarily in their agitated dresses.⁶ In calm symmetry, these women raise clubs while Orpheus stares with horror at one of the murderesses.⁷

It seems as if Orpheus's musical performance has been interrupted. The lyre, his instrument, lies idle, prominently placed in the foreground but out of reach of the attacked. His singing has died down—a singing that, as those familiar with the Orphic legend know, had the power to move beasts, rocks, humans, and gods. Soon mere noise, the muffled noise of the clubs hitting a human body, will fill the air, permanently obliterating the sweet sounds of musical performance.

Stark contrasts are also at work in the background, with its highly symbolic landscape. Arid and florid elements alternate. Stunted trees (an oak, a beech, and other plants) shroud the violent deed against the open landscape while a young fig tree leans toward its neighboring thicket without reaching it. The trunks are in line with two male figures, Orpheus and an infant boy, who flees the scene of killing. It is the tall, aged tree around which a banderole is tied bearing an inscription: *orfeuß der Erst puseran*.

The words are nothing less than an indictment. The German *puseran*, derived from the Venetian *buzerar*, is a strongly derogatory term for a sodomite, one who penetrates other, potentially younger men, in short, a bugger.⁸ The text suggests a reading of the death scene as just punishment, not crude violence. Note the bushy quality of the tree that surrounds the scroll. Not only does the writing appear in front of a lush section of leaves; it is also positioned high above the killing, its proximity to heaven suggestive of divine approval. The scroll is all the more worthy of attention since it is Dürer's addition to a scene he modeled on an Italian image, now lost, by Andrea Mantegna (1431–1506), known to us only through resonances in other images. Rendered as *puseran*, the

suggestion of same-sex sexual practice spelled violent death and destruction, similar to the biblical story of Sodom.⁹ Whereas depictions of Sodom have the city's destruction stand in for the sexual activities that were its cause—a cause deemed unrepresentable—Dürer shows the moment before the killing, thus ever so cautiously making homoerotic desire imaginable. Yet the words “Orpheus the first bugger” force themselves violently onto this visual representation of a murderous killing.

The scene is therefore one of multiple reversals: clothed women warriors kill a defenseless, almost naked man, the tamer of animals and the standard-bearer of civilizing forces, a victim of the bloody excess that he, according to legend, had helped overcome. Yet the image derides same-sex eroticism—the putto doesn't appear to be a compatible companion, and *puseran* is anything but a name suggesting self-description. The *puseran*'s desire is in fact marked as sterile: the boy runs away, the foreground is strikingly barren of vegetation; overall, signs of fertility like the fig tree contrast with highly prominent signs of lifelessness.¹⁰ Dürer's drawing thus images same-sex eroticism as sodomy, that is, through the lens of retribution. While acknowledging this sexual practice, the image works toward generating a sexual order posited as foundational—an order focused on cross-sex love and reproduction, an order from which Orpheus had departed.

Ancient Orpheus

For the postclassical world, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is the major source for Orpheus as a *puseran*.

Orpheus had shunned all
 Venus with women, either because it had turned out ill for him,
 or because he had given a pledge. Yet many women were gripped
 by a burning desire
 to join themselves with the bard; many grieved when rebuffed.
 He was even the instigator among the peoples of Thrace of
 transferring
 love to tender males and of plucking the first
 flowers of the brief age of spring before young manhood.

(10.79–85)¹¹

Or, to quote the last three lines of Ovid's Latin in a different translation:

His love was given
To young boys only, and he told the Thracians
That was the better way: *enjoy that springtime,*
*Take those first flowers.*¹²

A mere three lines on the subject but ones that the classicist W. K. C. Guthrie called, somewhat condescendingly, "pretty."¹³

In Ovid, love itself is essential to the lover. Once a lover, always a lover. Yet Orpheus's loves before and after his loss of Eurydice are structured by a number of antitheses: a man's love of boys held against male-female love; the namelessness of his male lovers versus Eurydice, this paragon of a female lover; the plural of short-lived lovers as opposed to the exclusiveness of an exalted love relationship; and, finally, death caused by revengeful rage contrasting with death as tragic loss. Through these antithetical narrative structures, Eurydice remains present after having long been replaced as a love object. Her absence—and absence is Eurydice's most enduring substance—makes her continuing presence all the more haunting. It doesn't come as a surprise, then, that the finale of the story as told by Ovid unites the two spouses happily in Hades and the nameless lover boys fall by the wayside on Orpheus's final descent into the world of the dead.

Here they both stroll, sometimes side by side,
or he follows as she goes ahead, or he goes in front to lead
the way,
and Orpheus, safely now, looks back on his Eurydice. (11.64–67)

It is as if the boy-loving Orpheus is, in Ovid's account, not the real Orpheus. He has become oblivious to his love for Eurydice, his praise of man-boy love is clumsy at times, and ultimately ineffective, offending the Thracian women, who proceed to kill him. Orpheus after Eurydice shows the signs of a wound, not to say trauma: partial amnesia, displacement, frailty. Ovid hardly wants us to sympathize with the protagonist. Rather, the author's cool voice inserts emotional distance into the narrative until the marital bond is fully restored in death.

This becomes particularly evident if one compares Ovid's account with Virgil's in the *Georgics*.¹⁴ Ovid competes with the older poet by providing a

counterpoint and, at times, a caricature. To give but two examples, the *Metamorphoses* reduces the period of grief for the final loss of Eurydice from seven months in Virgil's telling to a pitiful seven days. Where Virgil tells the story of the Thracian women's revenge for having scorned them, Ovid fills in the explanation of Orpheus as "having instigated" the love of beardless youths in Thrace.¹⁵

In Ovid, "Orpheus's [sexual] choice reveals that men require love, but they do not necessarily require women," writes Stephen Orgel.¹⁶ Yet what inspired other men to follow Orpheus's erotic lead is obviously not a precedent for women to seek sexual satisfaction with other women, so asymmetrical are the sexes' relations conceived. Instead, the love of men for youths has upset a previously balanced economy of erotic desires. Women, these losers in the new erotic economy, go into a violent rage, a rejection scenario that has spun out of control.

To be sure, Orpheus was popular as an initiator, instigator, or founder figure. For example, various legends attribute writing to him, though the ancients debated whether he did or did not invent the practice;¹⁷ in turn, modern scholarship has focused much on Orpheus as the founder of a religious cult.¹⁸ In the case of pederasty, however, the foundational trope makes man-boy sexual love a secondary sentiment, uncomfortably close to the love between men and women, which, the Ovidian myth seems to posit, came first. It is secondary because it came second, as a response, and secondary because it already existed somewhere else. Pederasty thus represents a signifier for aborted heterosexual love or, in the Orphic story, a queer reaction to loss.¹⁹ A certain unease with same-sex love's secondary status may explain why, in restoring *The Gay Greek Myths*, Andrew Callimach has the pederastic love of Orpheus precede his love for Eurydice.²⁰

While Orpheus is the originator—*auctor* is Ovid's weighty word—of a particular erotic practice, at least in Thrace, the myth of a boy-loving Orpheus did not originate with Ovid. According to a poetic fragment authored by Phanocles, a Hellenistic poet of the third century, Orpheus, "the son of Thracian Oeagrus, loved Calais, the son of Boreas, with all his heart, and went often in shaded groves still singing of his desire, nor was his heart at rest. But always, sleepless cares wasted his spirits as he looked at fresh Calais. The Bistonides, sharpening their long swords, ringed him in and killed him because he was the first in Thrace to desire men and to disapprove of the love of women."²¹ Unlike Ovid, this earlier version gives the hero's lover a name, Calais, and like Orpheus

he has a lineage.²² Ceaselessly, the lover's gaze is fixed on the beloved youth, a gaze that seems to exhaust him. Yet if Orpheus is "the first bugger," he is also "buggery's" first victim. It is the alignment of a particular sexual preference with rejection of the other sex that leads to his killing. As in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, in Phanocles's *Loves* Orpheus dies a hero of misogyny.

From the vantage point of a history of myths, however, Calais and Eurydice, with their conflicting claims to Orpheus's love, have much in common. Arguably, both plotlines are sentimental additions to a preclassical myth telling much less focused on the amorous, whoever the object of that love may have been. The motif of the antagonism of the sexes preceded the narrative embellishments of a Phanocles, Virgil, and Ovid. "Among the earliest evidence for the legend of Orpheus' death are the representations of it on vase-paintings," according to Guthrie, for they "go back to the fifth century B.C."²³ These depictions contrast the murderesses with Orpheus's singing to warriors, a narrative whose finale is the deadly encounter of an all-male world with that of an all-female rebellion. Apparently, the exclusion of women from religious rites was at stake.

Orpheus Christianus

What Ovid combined effectively, if disturbingly, in a narrative sequence, the love of spouses and a man's love for beardless males, medieval authors transformed by allegorical readings.²⁴ Following Martianus Capella (ca. 400), Boethius (ca. 480–ca. 524), and other Christianizing interpretations, Orpheus became an emblem of Christian theology, an allegory of virtuous eloquence, and a prefiguration of Christ. From the early Middle Ages, he was frequently likened to David and thus functioned as a patron of Latin poetry.

Only during the "Ovidian age" (*aetas ovidiana*)²⁵ of Latin literature in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, when Ovid's texts (including the *Metamorphoses*) became part of the curriculum at monastic schools,²⁶ does Orpheus seem to have experienced a comeback of a less Christian kind. Interestingly enough, we know of this renaissance not through works authored in the "textual community" (Brian Stock) that formed around the exchange of Ovid-inspired poetry in French monasteries—what Gerald Bond has anachronistically described as an "Ovidian subculture."²⁷ When Latin poetry of the time discusses the sexual love of men for youths, Ganymede triumphs. Where

Orpheus's death is commented on, however, his scorning the female sex is read *ad bonam partem*, that is, as a moral exemplum.²⁸ Exchanging the company of a woman for that of men was hailed as a hero's progression toward celibacy. Since, according to established allegorical readings, Eurydice represented concupiscence and Orpheus's infamous gaze had revealed an unworthy attachment to worldly desires, his life after Eurydice stood for the opposite, a turn to spiritual things and men, captured in illustrations as a bodily embrace of male friends.²⁹ Clearly, Orpheus had learned from his previous life as a spouse. Now he was free to engage in what he had become known for: poetry, scholarly pursuits, theology. Never mind the reasons.³⁰

This is the way the influential French *Ovide moralisé* tells the story, importing a specifically monastic interpretation into the world of vernacular readerships.³¹ Most allegorizations therefore elide the erotic impulse in the Ovidian tale. Instead, in the *Ovide moralisé* Orpheus becomes a symbol of all-encompassing male companionship with its enticing spectrum of affects shared among men. After all, like David, Orpheus had a companion whose name, according to one eleventh-century poem on Orpheus, is Jonathan.³² The myth of Orpheus was thus perfectly suited to please the all-male circles of clerics, scholars, and poets in which Ovidian poetry thrived in the High Middle Ages. But this mythical figure's multiple and contradictory significations could not be held at bay.

When "Orpheus the first bugger" entered the precincts of vernacular poetry and the courtly milieu, reprobation often replaced admiration and allegory. In Albrecht von Halberstadt's German translation of the *Metamorphoses*, dated circa 1200, books 10 and 11 must have hidden the reference to man-boy love behind a veil of rather un-Ovidian narrative twists and ellipses. I say "must have" because the relevant passages have only survived in Jörg Wickram's (ca. 1505–before 1562) mid-sixteenth-century German Ovid—an adaptation that primarily modernizes the older Middle High German text linguistically for a contemporary audience.³³

A recently discovered thirteenth-century German poem, attributed to the so-called Virtuous Scribe (*Der Tugendhafte Schreiber*),³⁴ artfully entwines Orpheus's minstrel-like artistry with his sexual acts by way of word choice. The author uses the German word *harphen*, "to harp," first in describing the familiar scene of Orpheus taming the animals.³⁵ But when the poet moves on to condemn the "wise master" (*wiser meister*) for having invented sodomy and turned his love (*minne*), or rather, as the poet says, "unlove" (*unminne*) to "beautiful young men" (*schône iunge man*), he returns to the word, this time giving it a clearly sexual meaning: He

who “harps thus and lets harp on him”—note the suggestion of passive intercourse—shall belong to the devil.³⁶ The poem’s frequent *un-* words divide what is right from what is worthy of condemnation, manly from unmanly behavior, right *minne* from odious *un-minne*. While *un-* formulations contain linguistically what they decry so vigorously, the term *barping* works metaphorically to connect different elements of the Orphic tradition.

Vernacular writers, with their wide readerships, were frequently disapproving of, if not outrightly squeamish about, Orpheus’s alleged shift in erotic tastes, not only in the German courtly imagination. Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* (1270–80), for instance, makes Orpheus the leader of the sodomites.³⁷ According to the authoritative words of Dame Natura, he invented (*controuva*) the rules that governed their lives (*regles*).³⁸ Therefore, those who defy their masculinity thus shall be excommunicated.³⁹ What is at stake in these passages is less the love of men for other males as a theologically grounded, politically undergirded concern over procreation and noble lineage. Not surprisingly, therefore, according to a mid-sixteenth-century humanist commentary in German, Orpheus, the ur-father of “Orpheunists” (*Orpheunisten*), alias sodomites, serves as an emblem for behavior “against nature.”⁴⁰

These negative voices, smaller in number compared to the stream of positive identifications, forged links between ancient mythology and the medieval intellectual landscape. They seem to reflect courtly anxieties about model masculinities as much as the deadly rhetoric of persecution surrounding Natura as guardian of God’s creation—a rhetoric that targeted those who supposedly fled Natura’s relentless rule over human desires.⁴¹ Yet it bespeaks the crossover as much as the divide between the Latin literary imagination and its vernacular counterpart, that anti-Orphic tirades became much more virulent in the latter while in Latin literature such jabs seem muted⁴² (which is neither to say that all vernacular texts voice their distance from the bard nor that all Latin texts embrace the figure). This is telling since the authors of the *Roman de la Rose* had mined the natural theology of Alan of Lille (1125/1130–1203) and other theologians for their own literary products, especially with regard to sodomophobia. Yet, while one rarely finds among the writings of Latin-trained theologians references to “Orpheus the first bugger,” some vernacular texts (by far not all) do comment on Ovid’s Orpheus after Eurydice.⁴³

It is in Dürer that these two traditions mesh, though, as I will argue, uneasily: Orpheus the exemplary artist and Orpheus the first bugger—an encounter mediated itself by the young Dürer’s encounter with Italian Renaissance art.

In *The Death of Orpheus*, the twenty-three-year-old gazes at artists and art in the south of Europe—a culture in which Orpheus experienced a revival among humanists.⁴⁴ In this image, Dürer recrafted a style not his own but Mantegna's—an image of the greatest importance to the making of Dürer as an artist but, at the same time, a reworking suspended between homage and condemnation.⁴⁵

Dürer's Orpheus: A Critical Approach

Dürer's *Death of Orpheus* has been the object of some of the finest art criticism. When lecturing on this image in 1905, Aby Warburg inaugurated an idea central to his concept of art in history, the double impact of the ancients on Renaissance art. According to Warburg, antiquity not only inspired well-proportioned classicism but, as in Dürer's drawing, the expression of excessive, extreme emotions. He therefore proposed to trace Dürer's piece to Greek vase paintings on the same theme.⁴⁶

Warburg's student, Edgar Wind, situated the drawing in a different register, the “mock-heroic,” presenting as parody what Warburg had identified as pathos. Furthermore, instead of approaching the image from its archetype in ancient art, he cast it as a witty critique of contemporary humanism with its faddish cult of Orpheus.⁴⁷

I propose a reading that departs from these interpretations without discarding them. I arrive at this understanding by taking into account more fully the textual elements Dürer left visibly on the image's surface. All too frequently, critics have taken these traces to be transparent but have failed to investigate the textual evidence in its pictorial context. I want to propose a rapprochement between pathos and parody on the grounds of ambivalence.⁴⁸ In fact, Wind's reading conjures up a host of descriptive terms, various affects and genres that cover an uneven terrain and do not sit well with the “mock-heroic” as an overriding description: *travesty, satire, parodies, ridicule, rudeness, contempt*, and even *disdain*.⁴⁹

Significantly, the scroll bearing the phrase “Orpheus the first bugger” traverses several registers, moving from the honorific priority of rank expressed in the word *first*—a dimension highlighted by the word's upper-case spelling (of course, this spelling can be said to be motivated also as opening the part of the motto to the right side of the branch)—to the abyss of insult.⁵⁰ The fact that pederasty was introduced to a particular region, Thrace, remains unmentioned. The regionalist explanation is, however, directly incorporated into the

word *puseran*, which has a particular geographic origin—Italy or, more precisely, Venice.⁵¹

Orpheus *puseran* was in sync with premodern notions of same-sex relations, which often sought to explain its occurrence through an explanatory framework of invention and geography. Sodomy, with all its connotations, was thought to inhabit a space outside of God's creation. In other words, it was a secondary practice. As a sign of humanity's sins, *sex contra naturam*, whatever its precise meaning, needed to be discovered, and a resourceful figure like Orpheus was, thanks to Ovid, a prime candidate in that regard. Whether women or men invented the practice, whether the men of Sodom or of Florence, the matrix of place and time provided a conceptual framework—explanations tinged, as here, by the defamatory.

The obvious has often gone unnoticed. In the scroll, Dürer, the disciple of Italian art and traveler to Italy, addresses a German audience. German is the text's language. But so is the insult, which relies on a popular stereotype in countries north of the Alps—a cliché that linked Italy to sexual sinfulness and sex between men in particular. As I have argued elsewhere, the constant reinvention of Italy as a sodomitical south was part and parcel of encounters between the north and the south—encounters whose frequency increased around the time Dürer reworked Mantegna's model image. As early as 1427, Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444) conjured up northerners' descriptions of Italian sexual licentiousness in order to motivate his fellow Tuscans to reform their ways: "O Italy, how contaminated you are, more than any other province! Go to the Germans, and hear what a pretty prize they grant Italians! They say there is no race in the world who are greater sodomites than the Italians!"⁵² During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Italy, this model society in terms of humanist education, court culture, and economic prowess, served as a model target in terms of alleged sexual tastes—a perception that would gain particular urgency during the Reformation.⁵³

But the scroll isn't the image's only textual trace. A book of music, open, echoes achievements traditionally associated with Orphic legends, Orpheus the ur-musician as well as Orpheus the inventor of writing (this object is left largely unexplored in Wind's article).⁵⁴ The book, like the scroll, could be Dürer's original addition (it is not on the Ferrarese print based on the same image by Mantegna, and it also does not concur fully with Mantegna's visual repertoire), but not necessarily.⁵⁵ Wolfgang Osthoff is, as far as I can see, the only critic to have deciphered the lyrics underneath the first system of musical notation. He

detected a message at odds with “Orpheus the first bugger” but in tune with a great artist whose fame survived his martyrlike death: *fama* or possibly *fami*.⁵⁶ Its language, characteristically, is Latin or Italian. Presented above the scene of killing, though lower than “Orpheus the first bugger,” this wording possibly expresses, whatever its source, veneration (be it Mantegna’s or Dürer’s veneration).⁵⁷ Thus, fame as well as infamy would appear on this image as a queer pairing of words. A close examination in the Hamburger Kunsthalle revealed that it would be rash to accept Osthoff’s reading, however. We are dealing with tiny scribbles that, to the best of my reading abilities, do not constitute a recognizable word or phrase.⁵⁸

In his description of *The Death of Orpheus*, Erwin Panofsky works hard to link Dürer’s representation “all’antica” to classicism, mediated through secondary Italian sources and contemporary translations but nevertheless “more classical in spirit than . . . his direct Italian sources”—a description that echoes throughout the literature on Dürer.⁵⁹ Yet the “ambiguity of feeling” Panofsky projects exclusively onto medieval attitudes toward the ancient heritage persists well into the so-called Renaissance. (The *Ovide moralisé* was still printed in the sixteenth century.) Pace Panofsky, Renaissance attitudes toward ancient art did not constitute a radical break with the “medieval” attitudes vis-à-vis mythology.⁶⁰

The drawing’s “ambiguity” with regard to same-sex eroticism is not, at least not solely, an affect reserved for northern artists. A drawing by Marco Zoppo (1432–78), for instance, has the infant participate in the killing of Orpheus.⁶¹ Nor is *The Death of Orpheus* necessarily Dürer’s confessional piece.⁶² If anything, the confession, which Klaus-Peter Schuster ascribes to the image, is again mediated.⁶³ Antoinette Roesler-Friedenthal has argued that the face of Orpheus on Dürer’s drawing is that of Andrea Mantegna.⁶⁴

In the same year in which *The Death of Orpheus* was copied, 1494, Dürer adapted two other works by Mantegna.⁶⁵ Although the model for our drawing is lost, Mantegna is known to have depicted the Orpheus myth (including the death scene) repeatedly and is likely to have imaged his own likeness by using the mythical mask of Orpheus. This is not to say that Mantegna must have fashioned himself as a “bugger” or, in Dürer’s words, as a *puseran*. We know too little of Mantegna’s erotic desires to prove or disprove such an assumption.⁶⁶ The Italian artist may have used the bard’s mask to pose as the artist who died a martyr of his art; after all, in Padova’s Ovetari chapel (where Mantegna painted his now lost likeness), relations with his patron had turned sour. But what he

meant to do may be less important than how humanists were able to interpret his doings. With Ovid and Poliziano in mind, the artist's Orphic identification lent itself to a crude insult: "Mantegna, an artist-bugger and reinventor of sodomy." Whether the butt of Dürer's invective is, however, Mantegna in particular rather than Italians, especially humanists, in general is hard to know.⁶⁷ The two men never met. During his Italian journey of 1506, Dürer, at Mantegna's request, set out from Venice to visit the revered fellow artist. Yet Mantegna died before Dürer's arrival.⁶⁸

Dürer's *Death of Orpheus*, then, is a work of translation, a translation that has not been completed and therefore brings to the fore the work of translation itself, a tension-prone process that arrests our gaze.⁶⁹ And we are still looking and trying to make sense. Tensions abound visually and textually. As in other images, Dürer placed the date, 1494, and his initials, A.D., in relation to the drawing's composition.⁷⁰ This authentication is out of line with the center, which, both geometrically and optically, tilts slightly to the left. Such a placement "in between" may in fact gesture toward the infant's escape from the scene. While the boy is shown to move rapidly to the image's edge, his eyes are turned back. The two gazes—the infant's and Orpheus's—are themselves indicative of a splitting within the image's double binds of veneration and ridicule, Italian art and German text, sexual insult and ancient myth. Yet nowhere do these tensions appear more tangible than in the image's lively background, with its fig tree bending toward a bushy thicket—trees that ostensibly do not touch.⁷¹ To be sure, this scenery is strongly reminiscent of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. According to book 10, trees gathered around Orpheus in order to provide the bard with shade; northern plants such as the oak and the beech are part of Ovid's as well as Dürer's setting.⁷² Conversely, the *Metamorphoses* lists many other plants in addition, while the fig with its southern and sexual connotations is un-Ovidian. In Dürer, the background can thus be read as a subtle commentary on the image's themes, the infertility of same-sex eroticism (as I argued earlier) but also North meets South.

In fact, the figure of Orpheus may have had a particular appeal for Dürer or, for that matter, other northern artists—at least, if they were familiar with the intricacies of Orphic legends. Orpheus, the great civilizer and performer, was from barbarous Thrace, not from civilized Greece—a notion somewhat offensive to Greek sensibilities.⁷³ Viewed thus, *The Death of Orpheus* offers a puzzling reinscription of Dürer's own trajectory via an ancient myth and Mantegna's model image: a story about the brilliant artist from the north who looked south to learn its ways, copying while leaving his mark visibly on

the image's surface. Although the new Apelles from Nuremberg would embrace Italian Renaissance art more fully in some of his paintings, and although his "revolutionizing German-Italian hybrid style"⁷⁴ would generate a large following south of the Alps, Dürer's drawing of 1494 does not impart a message lucidly. It neither states that one ought to reject same-sex desire⁷⁵ (which elides the artist's investment in copying a scene that features Orpheus) nor presents a moral tale exhorting its viewers to leave the world of sensuality and embrace the spiritual in art (an interpretation that privileges the visual over the textual).⁷⁶ It is a mix of several competing impulses that has riddled the interpretation of *The Death of Orpheus*, though it is the inextricable entanglement of the erotic with the artistic that lies at the image's core. Read differently, however, these tensions echo the fate of Orpheus in a postclassical world.

Interestingly, Dürer's drawing remained just that, a drawing. The scene does not reappear in his graphic work, nor was it ever remodeled and distributed as a print. No echoes among Dürer's students attest to the image's circulation. What does, however, persist in the artist's oeuvre were individual elements first formulated in *The Death of Orpheus*: he adapted the drawing's suggestive background for several other prints, most notably the engraving *Hercules Defending Virtue against Vice* of 1498; Orpheus's posture is that of Christ in one of the Passion cycles.⁷⁷ These reappropriations pervade Dürer's visual repertoire, while the image itself, with its glaring tensions, did not.

To sum up, I have investigated several junctures with regard to "Orpheus the first bugger": Ovid, medieval theology, courtly literature, and the German Renaissance. None of these versions was original, all of them were writing on, rewriting, or overwriting existing narratives, be they verbal or visual. There is, in other words, no point of departure, though origin, the origin of same-sex eroticism, is what the myth of "Orpheus the first bugger" purports to signify. Whatever the version, the myth of Orpheus inscribes same-sex sociability and eroticism in a sexual order that includes both sexes. Put differently, Orpheus after Eurydice emerges as an Orpheus with Eurydice.

Today Orpheus's story is alive and well. Next to Prometheus and Venus, Orpheus is one of the few figures of ancient mythology to have survived through the ruptures we call modernity. "Orpheus the first bugger," however, still much of a prickle between the lines of John Milton's verse or George Frederick Handel's cantatas, has receded into sheer oblivion.⁷⁸ Few contemporary representations, be it in writings, music, sculpture, film, or painting, seem to

openly exploit his sexual versatility.⁷⁹ To be sure, Orpheus is often depicted as a man whose features are like those of a woman⁸⁰—a bodily register some critics identify *tel-quel* with the homosexual. But such a reading seems at least short-sighted in conflating physical signs of refinement or softness with other, sexual, suspicions of a queer masculinity.

Early modern courtly culture, with its *entrées royales*, pageants, and, importantly, operas, may in fact have claimed Orpheus as an emblem of statehood so vigorously that little space remained for the depiction of what passed as sexual irregularities, unfit for festive representation.⁸¹ In modernity, notions of the fluidity of desires have given way to inscribing the sexual more firmly in the body and the mind; an Orpheus who changed sexual tastes somewhere in midlife thus had less appeal. However, these are thoughts and conjectures beyond the immediate thrust of my essay. Let me conclude with what I did find, “Orpheus in His Underwear.”

The cover of William Bory’s poetry collection of 1993, named after its signature poem, “Orpheus in His Underwear,” features not “the first bugger” but Narcissus as the mythical figure most suitable for the modern gay imagination in the West.⁸² The photographer, Kelly Grider, translates the Orphic nexus of eros and thanatos into an image depicting gay male lovers as near twins.⁸³ The two lookalike bodies float as if underwater, their corpses symmetrically entwined in a religiously charged pose. Potentially, one man’s empty gaze reminds us of the ancient myth of Orpheus. Their bodies’ damaged skin may conjure up distant memories of the violent rage of women.⁸⁴ Or it may just be the effect of a deadly sex scenario.

NOTES

1. Pausanias 1971, 372. I want to thank the many friends, colleagues, and listeners who engaged several presentations of this piece—in Ann Arbor, Boston, and Cape Town. I am grateful to Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken for having first provoked my interest in this thematic. Kerry Boeye gave this article an illuminating read. Larry Silver and James Saslow were kind enough to comment on a draft version. Above all, I want to thank Pat Simons for urging me to further my analysis and inspiring me to continue my work.

2. Ovid 1999, 46 (10.64).

3. For a brilliant approach to Orpheus that is all about his gaze at Eurydice, see Blanchot 1981, 99–104. The Swiss philosopher Hans Saner has recently suggested a moratorium on this question, central to many interpretations; see Saner 2000, 21–23.

4. Anzelewsky 1988, 55. Thomas Bein (1990, 33–55), the only critic who, to my knowledge, has devoted a full article to this motif, does not mention Dürer’s piece since

his focus is on an earlier period. Only pages 50–55 deal with Orpheus as the inventor of sodomy, however. The rest of the essay treats representations of same-sex sexuality in medieval literature in general.

5. Hamburger Kunsthalle, Kupferstichkabinett, “Der Tod des Orpheus” (The Death of Orpheus). Cf. Anzelewsky 1988, 55; and Roettig 2001, 134–35. Dürer had a particular interest in depicting violent scenes in the 1490s, for example, *Youth Kneeling before an Executioner* (drawing, ca. 1493) and *The Ravisher or a Young Woman Attacked by Death* (engraving, ca. 1495) in Bartrum et al. 2002, 101, 110; and *Execution of St. Catherine* (1498) in Mellinkoff 1993, 2.1.58.

6. On ancient models for their portrayal, see Simon 1971–72, 24–25.

7. It is noteworthy that the facial expression of the one woman whose face we are able to see does not convey the frenzy the term *maenad* invokes—a term used frequently in descriptions of this piece. In his influential *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Erwin Panofsky (1955, 32), for instance, describes the scene as follows: “[T]hey burst upon their victim with the fury of genuine maenads.” I have chosen not to describe the women as maenads, resisting the intrusion of ancient tellings of the myth on our reading of this piece. Yet facial expressions are notoriously hard to read, particularly in the case of artists such as Mantegna or Dürer, who preferred to portray women with little visible affect or with downcast eyes, as here. Research into Renaissance representations of maenads will have to bring further clarification on this point.

8. Of fifty-eight cases of insults that were prosecuted in Venice by the Avogaria di comun between 1500 and 1625, five featured the term *bugger* (*buzerar/buzerona*). See Horodowich 2000, 29–31, 62. Cf. Boerio 1856, 112 (s.v. *buzarà, buzarada, buzazar, bùzaro, buzarona*).

9. The similarity of the two stories—sexual acts, punishment, and a gaze backward connect them—might also have been alluded to in Milton’s *Comus* according to Falconer (1996, 57–58).

10. Götz 1965, 140–43. On Dürer’s drawing, the fig tree bears fruit, though not abundantly. According to the evangelists Matthew (12:18–22) and Mark (11:12–14), Christ condemned an infertile fig tree. I depart from many interpreters of the scene who have read the infant boy merely as a love object and do not dwell on his symbolic dimension. For literature, see the subsequent text. On sodomy as a sterile sin, see Hergemöller 1996, 221–22, 245–46, 295, 304, 312, 321. It is especially noteworthy that anxieties about the sodomites’ refusal to procreate were of great concern in both the Latin theology and vernacular literature of the Middle Ages.

11. The translation is from Ovid 1999, 47. The Latin runs: *omnemque refugerat Orpheus / femineam Venerem, seu quod male cesserat illi, / siue fidem dederat; multas tamen ardor habebat / iungere se uati; multae doluere repulsae. / ille etiam Thracum populus fuit auctor amorem / in teneros transferre mares citraque iuuentam / aetatis breue uer et primos carpere flores.*

12. Ovid 1955, 236.

13. Guthrie 1993, 32.

14. Virgil 1990, 87–91. See also Lee 1996.

15. For a fuller comparison, see Anderson 1982.

16. Orgel 2004, 490.

17. Detienne 2002, 132–36.
18. Various volumes are devoted to this theme: Borgéaud 1991; Brisson 1995. See also Linforth 1941; and Mead 1965.
19. Zeiger 1997, 13 and *passim*.
20. Callimach 2002, 63–73.
21. Quoted after Friedman 1970, 9. Cf. Bremmer 1991, 13–30, esp. 21, and Alexander 1988.
22. It is the same lineage that appears in the speech of Phaedrus in the *Symposium*. Cf. Plato 1983, 104.
23. Guthrie 1993, 33–34.
24. Brinkmann 1980, 205–6; and Jaeger 1992, 141–68, esp. 144, n.11, provide extensive bibliographical notes on Orpheus in the Middle Ages. See also Tülek 1998.
25. The term was coined by L. Traube. It is quoted in Kugler 1989, col. 250.
26. Hexter 1986; Kugler 1989, cols. 247–74.
27. Bond 1986.
28. Many of the relevant texts have been made available in Atkinson and Babbi 2000.
29. Panofsky 1955, 32 and fig. 51.
30. Obviously, I am presenting a synthetic version of medieval voices on Orpheus in this context. C. S. Jaeger (1994, 139–64) subtly contextualizes Orphic poetry at the cathedral schools in eleventh-century France.
31. Ovid 1954, 257–58.
32. Jaeger 1992, 157–58. In this poem, Orpheus and Jonathan serve as allegories of competing cathedral schools and the poet makes, in Jaeger's words, an "extravagant offer to peace" (157). That Ganymede and Orpheus were read together is evidenced by a late illustration to a seventeenth-century edition of the *Metamorphoses*, *Ovid's 'Metamorphoses', Translated by the Most Eminent Hands, Adorn'd with Sculptures*, Amsterdam 1717. This edition has been republished by Albrecht (2000), with plates in the appendix to Books 10 and 11. See Albrecht's commentary on these images on pages 245–51 (without allusion to the Ganymede figure).
33. Wickram 1990. Cf. Stackmann 1978, cols. 187–91; Kugler 1989, cols. 247–73, here 259–60; and Rücker 1997.
34. Cf. Tervooren and Bein 1988; and Schnell 1993, cols. 1138–41. The Virtuous Scribe is known to have been connected with the landgraves of Thuringia, the same region and dynasty that Albrecht von Halberstadt, the translator of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, mentions in his prologue.
35. Bein 1990, 35, l.5–6: *des harphen was den wilden tieren sô bekant, daz sie dâ bî vergâzen gar ir wilde*.
36. Bein 1990, 35, l.11–12: *der alsô harphet ûnde an im harphen lât*. This coinage is not unique to the poem; see, as Bein mentions (1990, 36), *Carmina Burana* 185.6. In ancient literature, lyre playing occasionally provided a sexual metaphor; see Adams 1990, 25. In an e-mail message of January 29, 2005, Pat Simons supplied me with a number of references from the Italian Renaissance that similarly link stringed instruments to sexual activity.

37. In light of stylistic considerations, the German verses discussed here are likely to predate the French *Roman de la Rose*.

38. The word connotes the rules of religious orders.

39. Ll. 19652–56: “Quant Orpheüs veulent ensivre, / Qui ne sot arer ne escrivre / Ne forgier en la dreite forge, / Penduz seit il par mi la gorge! / Quant teus regles leur controuva, / Vers Nature mal es prouva.” Quoted after de Lorris and de Meun 1979, 3.53–54. Nature’s grievance in the *Roman de la Rose* is unthinkable without Alan of Lille’s *De planctu naturae* and his *Anticlaudianus*. With regard to other sources, see the discussion in Economou 1972, 104–24.

40. Gerhard Lorichius, in Wickram 1990, 550.

41. Cf. Cadden 2003.

42. For a negative reference to Orpheus in Latin writings, see Alan of Lille 1978, 797–879, esp. 834, l.54. It is this passage, among others, that influenced the authors of the *Roman de la Rose*. See Hergemöller 1996, 201, n. 28.

43. Needless to say, though less interesting analytically, modern scholarship has followed suit and erred on the side of squeamishness. Cf. W. K. C. Guthrie’s (1993, 31–32) inimitable comment: “After the loss of his wife, and the period of mourning which Virgil and Ovid describe him as passing by the banks of the Strymon, Orpheus shunned entirely the company of women, and so did not avoid the report which so often attaches to those who love celibate lives, of having another outlet for his passions”; or Münzer 1939, cols. 1200–1316, col. 1287: “und nicht übel läßt Ovid den O. gerade, während er diese Verirrungen [!] besingt, von den wütenden Thrakerinnen überfallen werden.”

44. Angelo Poliziano’s *Le favole d’Orfeo* was first performed in Mantua in 1480, for instance.

45. While it is *communis opinio* that the drawing is based on a Mantegna image, now lost, that must have been available to the artist, the literature is divided on the question of whether we can assume he executed the piece during a stay in Italy. Panofsky (1955, 32) debated and disputed this notion, arguing that “Dürer had absorbed the spirit of Italian art before he ever set foot on Italian soil.” See also Eberlein 2003, 19–20; and Roesler-Friedenthal 1996, 149–85, esp. 150, n. 2. The scant records available about Dürer’s potential first trip to Italy in the mid-1490s do not permit us to settle this question with certainty.

46. Warburg 1979, 125–36. It was also in 1905 that Heinrich Wölfflin’s *Die Kunst Albrecht Dürers* appeared.

47. Wind 1938–39.

48. That Dürer scholars have failed to discuss the image’s ambivalence has much to do with a persisting image of Dürer as the artist who brought the achievements of Renaissance art to the North. Saslow (1986) was correct, in my view, to summarize his short discussion of Dürer’s *Death of Orpheus* with the following statement: “Whether Dürer intended to elevate or satirize homoerotic love is open to debate” (33). In a footnote, Saslow writes: “[I]t is hard to see why he would so fiercely attack the very figures from whom he drew inspiration” (211). This double move, I want to argue, is precisely what is at stake, however.

49. Wind 1938–39, *passim*.

50. Anzelewsky (1983, 15–28) has addressed this question: “Alle Überlegungen, die das verschollene Bild Mantegnas betreffen, deuten darauf hin, daß es als moralische Allegorie, und zwar am wahrscheinlichsten als Verurteilung der Päderastie, gedacht war, so daß Dürers offenbar recht getreue Nachzeichnung gleichfalls in diesem Sinne zu verstehen sein dürfte, ohne daß die verschiedenen Nebenbedeutungen völlig ausgeschlossen werden könnten” (28). On the use of banderoles in Dürer, note, for instance, that the aforementioned *The Ravisser* has one that stretches over the whole scene, though there is no text on it.

51. The etymology of *buzerar/puseran* is far from clear. *Bugiardo* (liar), as suggested by Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm (1860, col. 569), seems far-fetched. As far as I can see, it is not related to the English *bugger*. As a verbal insult, *puseran* was not uncommon north of the Alps; it became especially prominent in the context of Reform pamphlets. Dürer’s usage is not the first recorded. See, for example, Hemmerli 1535 (*De matrimonio*) 200vb: “busurones” (Latin); *De matrimonio* was written in 1456. Hemmerli added a lengthy explanation to make sure his readers understood, apparently unsure (or pretending to be so, since he wanted to place the sin south of the Alps) whether his audience would know an Italianizing word such as *busurones*. Dürer’s usage of the word is thus by no means evidence to his having been in Venice at the time he composed the drawing (cf., however, Panofsky 1955, 32; and Götz 1965, 142–43). Luber (2005) argues that Dürer traveled to Venice only once in his life and not in the 1490s.

52. Quoted from Rowland 1994, 310. See also St. Bernardino of Siena 1989, 1149: *O Italia, quanto ne se’ contaminata più che altra provincia! Va a’ Tedeschi, e ode che bello vanto e’ danno a’ Taliani. Dicono che non è generazione al mondo che sieno maggiori sodomitti ch’e’ Taliani* (see also 1146). Cf. Rocke, 1989; and Mormando 1999, esp. 139.

53. Puff 2003, 124–66.

54. More specifically, it has been suggested that this is a book of so-called Orphic hymns, popular texts in Renaissance humanism. Cf. Osthoff 1972.

55. Ferraresischer Meister (ca. 1465), Kupferstichkabinett, Hamburg, Inv. 22. See “Der Tod des Orpheus,” in Hofmann 1985, 176, n. 386. Osthoff (1972) suggests that it was part of the model image. He seeks to identify the musical piece depicted in Mantegna’s Italian context. On Mantegna’s visual repertoire, cf. Martineau 1992. Especially the various copies of Mantegna’s lost drawing *Hercules and Antaeus* lend themselves to a comparison with *The Death of Orpheus* (the use of a tree to structure the background, the inscription, the instrument as part of the tree, allegorical interpretations such as “spirit overcoming flesh”); see Martineau (1992), 298–322. Anzelewsky has also mentioned various paintings that are comparable in the composition of the background (*Abraham’s Sacrifice* and *Samson and Delila*). Regarding *The Death of Orpheus*, however, he cautions against determining who invented the book as a background element: “Im Werk des Mantegna gibt es zwar Inschriften auf Tafeln, an Gebäuden und auf Spruchbändern, aber etwas mit dem Notenbuch Vergleichbares läßt sich weder auf seinen Bildern noch auf seinen Zeichnungen oder in seiner Graphik feststellen” (23).

56. Osthoff 1972, 40–41. Schuster (1978, 11) accepted his reading. Roesler-Friedenthal (1996, 154, n. 9) cites it critically.

57. In his attempt to identify the musical piece among contemporary compositions, Osthoff (1972) suggests *famme*, *fammi*, or *fami* instead.

58. This is not one word but two, something like *fa ne*. I thank the helpful staff at the Kupferstichkabinett, Hamburg, especially Andreas Stolzenburg, for allowing me to spend so much time with this drawing.

59. Panofsky 1955, 35.

60. About this point, Buck's discussion is instructive, precisely because his assessment is profoundly influenced by Panofsky's. Cf. Buck 1976, 192–227.

61. See Roesler-Friedenthal 1996, 178–79. Zoppo is known to have been a friend and artistic follower of Mantegna. I did not have access to Hannelore Semmelrath's unpublished dissertation. She focuses little on *The Death of Orpheus* in Italian art, however. See Semmelrath 1994. Thanks to Jakob Michelsen for supplying me with this information.

62. Tellingly, Wölfflin (1971, 52) writes: "We shall not discuss whether Dürer had any personal interest in the subject."

63. Schuster 1978, 7–24, esp. 13–14. On page 13, Schuster speaks of the "Bekenntnischarakter von Dürers Orpheuszeichnung."

64. Roesler-Friedenthal 1996. Dürer may have seen the likeness in Padua's Ovetari chapel (now lost) or the self-portrait may have been the one in the lost Mantegna image. In this case, the version after Mantegna in Hamburg's Kupferstichkabinett replaced his with a young man's face. On Mantegna's influence on Dürer as an engraver, see also Koerner 2002, 21.

65. *Battle of the Sea Gods* and *Bacchanal with Silenus*, the former in Panofsky 1955, fig. 47, the latter in Bartrum et al. 2002, 107–8. Cf. Simon 1971–72, passim. Possibly Dürer familiarized himself (further?) with Mantegna's work in the workshop of the Bellinis in Venice. The Italian artist was married to Jacopo Bellini's daughter, Nicolosa, sister of Gentile and Giovanni.

66. See, however, the short discussion in Sternweiler 1993, 132–33.

67. Sternweiler (1993, 136–37) raises the question of whether it was Poliziano, the author of *Orfeo*, who was the object of Dürer's ridicule. We need to remind ourselves, however, that references to Mantegna and/or other Italian humanists were not necessarily Dürer's in origin but possibly already belonged to the prototype.

68. Simon 1971–72, 21.

69. Cf. Wölfflin 1971, 52: "The engraving is not simply copied, but transposed form by form into the language of modelling lines developed by Schongauer, and this is no small achievement."

70. There is no study, I believe, that systematically discusses the placement of texts on images in Dürer's oeuvre. See, however, Koerner 1993 on Dürer's self-portrait of 1500.

71. While the individual figures as well as the composition show Dürer's dependence on a Mantegnesque model, the differences between the Ferrarese print and the image of 1494 are particularly apparent in the background. There critics have frequently located Dürer's creative contribution.

72. Whether they were also part of Mantegna's model image remains a matter of speculation.

73. Münzer 1939, cols. 1228–38.
74. Koerner 2002, 21.
75. Anzelewsky 1983.
76. Schuster 1978.
77. Panofsky 1955, 61; Schuster 1978, 9.
78. Cf. Falconer 1996, 55–58; and Harris 2001.
79. Cellier 1971, 343–67; Strauss 1971; Henry 1992.
80. Notably, Gustave Moreau's influential canvas of 1866: *Reverently a maiden recovers the head and lyre of Orpheus, carried on the waters of the Hebron [River] to Thracian shores* (*Une jeune fille recueille pieusement la tête d'Orphée et sa lyre portées par les eaux de l'Hebre aux rivages de la Thrace*) (Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Cf. *French Symbolist Painters* 1972, pl. i and 80–81; Mathieu 1976, 98–101; and Kosinski 1986.
81. It is at the ducal court of the Medici that artists pioneered representations of Orpheus for the purposes of political propaganda; see *The Medici, Michelangelo, and the Art of Late Renaissance Florence* 2002. As Simons notes, however, Agnolo Bronzino's portrait *Duke Cosimo I de' Medici as Orpheus* has strong homoerotic overtones (1997, 20–51, esp. 31–32, 42).
82. Bory 1993.
83. The photo on the front is called *An Untitled Constellation*. With reference to Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization*, Walter Strauss (1971, 11) points to the similarities of Narcissus and Orpheus in the modern imagination.
84. The first poem in the collection is "Orpheus in His Underwear" and features the lines "At night, he dreams of his mother's leafy skirts, / of teeth, breaking his skin" (Bory 1993, 3).

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Dead Letters

Catherine Brown

The Historian always reads an unintended, purloined letter.
—Carolyn Steedman, *Dust*

a

I HAVE ALWAYS BEEN HAUNTED by things like this. Like this: when I was little, I knew time passed. I did not think that I could stop it; I made little monuments to the fact that I could not stop it. I hid letters to a future self in secret places around the house: a cavity I found in the old bedstead in my parents' room, an imagined secret drawer in my father's desk. And on December 24, when all was dark and quiet and lit against the night, I wrote a note about how all was dark and quiet and lit against the night, scrolled it up tight, and slipped it down the neck of one of the balls on the Christmas tree. And then, in the trough of nothing special that follows Christmas Day, I would look at the ball and secretly think of magic air suspended.

I had a big picture book about Egyptian archaeology. I knew about the air that rushed from Tutankhamen's tomb when the seal was broken. I knew that the ancient funeral bouquets that the seal breakers saw dissolved almost instantly in the inrush of twentieth century. What do you see? they asked Howard Carter, who was first in line at the broken seal. Wonderful things, he said, Wonderful things.

b

Not long ago, my beloved, by chance someone brought me the letter of consolation you had sent to a friend. I saw at once . . . that it was yours, and was all

the more eager to read it since the writer is so dear to my heart. I hoped for a renewal of strength, at least from the writer's words, which would picture for me the reality I have lost.

And that reality is this, is *this*: what is here, now, under my fingers as I touch these letters out. I have not lost it; I have it here. I have it here; I have lost it.

It might help to define some terms.

Letters are the indices of things, the signs of words, and such is their power that, though voiceless themselves, they speak to us the sayings of the absent.

Letter. Literally, an epistle; whence we read in the book of Kings that Uriah brought with him the letters of his own death. It is used to mean history, as when we say, "Expound this to the letter," that is, historically. It is also used for the literal meaning, whence the Apostle: "the letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth."

The letter is haunted: Expound this to the letter. That is, historically. King David took time off from poetry for love, conceived it for Uriah's wife, and wrote the letter-death that Uriah carried: Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.

Check your pockets now for letters. Don't worry if you can't find yours. It's there.



If you were Howard Carter, you would know that the last eyes to read the name above this door are dead these thirty centuries. You would know yourself the first in all those many years to see this jumble of furniture and gods and chariots and flowers, to breathe this ancient vanishing air.

The dream of being Howard Carter, of breaking the seal: scholarship's romance, the desire and possession that *Possession: A Romance* is all about. The dream of finding the packet of love letters buried with the great poet's body. And discovering on top of it that the great poet is not just your dissertation topic, but your own blood, and that the letters in the coffin are from your own family.

That's the fantasy at its highest, most necrophilic pitch. There are other, less gothic, ways to live it. More scholarly and scientific but no less romanced is

this: the task of scholarship, says the great classicist Wilamovitz, is to bring that dead world to life by the power of science. We could roll our eyes at Wilamovitz together. But that would be unfair, both to Wilamovitz and to scholarly desire itself. What *scientia* we have confers no powers. But there is death in the schoolroom, and the schoolroom is bound both to that death and to something else that feels unlike it.

A ninth-century Irish scribe writes in the margin of his book: Blessed be the soul of Fergus, Amen. I'm cold. Another, writing in another margin of another book: Alas! Oh, my hand, how much parchment have you covered with ink! You will make that parchment famous, but you, you will be one white stick in a bundle of bones. And look at the trace of this white stick.

cilne on enne god fader

We don't know his name, but we do know that he lived in the early thirteenth century and wrote copiously in the margins of his monastery's books. Scholars call him the Tremulous Hand of Worcester. It is a good name.

Every pen stroke is a trapped instant. A message in a bottle perhaps, but there is no message, or the message lies not in the words the pen strokes form but in the pen strokes' mere existence, their wobble, their testimony to the presence of a hand no less particular for being absent. Though voiceless themselves, they testify to the movements of the absent. A less movemented ductus lets us forget these buried instants and read through letters for the meaning that they index.

The Tremulous Hand is a reminder. Its every movement, the work to get the words out, quivers here, as if he just put down his pen. Remember this: *Memento manus*, remember the hand. The hand is both here and not here, both dead and not quite; both, impossibly, both at once. This is worth thinking about because it is beyond thought.

This can help one feel what Wilamovitz means: the task of scholarship is to bring that dead world to life by the power of science. . . . A feeling of wonder in the presence of something we do not understand is the starting-point; the goal was a pure, beatific contemplation of something we have come to understand in all its truth and beauty.

Though we might now distrust such vatic confidence, the same place is the starting place: a feeling of *wonder*. Not, however, from the presence of something we have or may ever come to understand.

Wonder is not mere curiosity; it is more complicated and more deeply dangerous than that. Wonder requires us to acknowledge what we do not know or may never know, to acknowledge the limits of knowledge. It is, then, a different species of knowledge, a way of knowing that does not lead to certainties or truths about the world or the way things are. It is a state of mind that, like being in love, colors all we know.

I love seeing this: the Tremulous Hand took a break halfway through translating the Nicene Creed. When he comes back, he's fresh. His lines are straighter and his spacing more controlled. There's the moment, right there.

**þe ead crimed mid yulde to deminde þen cy-
 þe and þā deaðen, and hit riče ne bið non ende, and
 ic clea on þene holi goð þene liffe tan god, þe ge-
 of þen fader and of þen sunu, and he is mid þa fader**

You can step into it, but probably for no more than an instant. It's like looking into a bright light. It is a place where then and now, presence and absence, "I" and "other," "subject" and "object" are flatly inadequate—as inadequate as "truth" and "beauty" or even "correct" and "incorrect." This is worth thinking about because it is beyond thought.

At 2 PM on Sunday, November 26, 1922, Howard Carter put his eye to the hole they had knocked in the door to the tomb. It was some time before one could see, the hot air escaping caused the candle to flicker, but as soon as one's eyes became accustomed to the glimmer of light the interior of the chamber gradually loomed before one. . . . There was naturally short suspense for those present who could not see, when Lord Carnarvon said to me "Can you see anything?" I replied to him Yes, it is wonderful. I then with precaution made the hole sufficiently large for both of us to see. With the light of an electric torch as well as an additional candle we looked in. Our sensations and astonishment are difficult to describe as the better light revealed to us the marvelous collection of treasures: . . . Our sensations were bewildering and full of strange emotion. We questioned one another as to the meaning of it all.



Some writers like to think they're cheating time, a haunted thought if ever there was one. The fingers rejoice in writing, wrote a poet named Rhabanus Maurus, who died in a place called Winkel on the river Rhine on February 4, 856.

No work sees the light which hoary old age
does not destroy or wicked time overturn:
Only letters are immortal and ward off death
only letters in books bring the past to life.

Stories of paper immortality make good press. Pliny the Elder dug this one up from an earlier writer, one Cassius Hemina. Expound this historically, that is, to the letter.

A farmer, plowing, turns up a coffin. Its cargo is Numa Pompilius, king of Rome, dead these 535 years. The coffin also holds papyrus rolls which are miraculously incorrupt, perhaps because a boss they rested on kept them out of the roiling stew of the body's decay, perhaps because they had been treated with citrus oil. Pliny is not sure why they survived, but he's sure they did, and tells us this story to prove that on the use of papyrus human immortality is built.

Pliny's right—if you take eternal contact with the dead as a mark of immortality. If he were here, I'd tell him stories of the transmigration of paper:

Many archives now hold treasure troves of Hellenistic Greek papyri, fragments no bigger than a finger or two together, phrases hanging in midair. Many of these have been recovered from the papyrus maché used to make mummy cases. And wrapped around the unreading dead, yards and yards of linen that has lasted too.

In 1847, a New York geologist named Isaiah Deck went to Egypt in search of Cleopatra's emerald mines. He didn't find emeralds, but he did find mummy pits, where one could see fragments and limbs exposed in such plenty and variety that the wanderer would be impressed with the idea that he was in the studio of a Frankenstein, in an extensive line of business. And the mummy pits gave him an idea: in 1855, as the price of paper rose, Dr. Deck proposed to dig up two and a half million tons of Egyptian mummies, ship them to New York, unwind them, and use their linen wrappings to make paper. Dr. Deck's

imagination doesn't flinch from the work or from the haunting: he sees a sheet of the *New York Times* . . . issued on the indestructible shroud of Moses' fairer stepmother, and a modern-day Abelard and Heloise, he suggests, might soon correspond on stationery that was once the chemisette enveloping the bosom of Joseph's fair temptress.

Not long ago, my beloved, by chance someone brought me the letter of consolation you had sent to a friend. I saw at once . . . that it was yours, and was all the more eager to read it since the writer is so dear to my heart.

The books found in Numa's tomb, by the way, contained the philosophical writings of Pythagoras. Pliny tells us that the finders promptly burned them.



Thesis: the *death of ancient culture* inevitable. To characterize Greek culture as the prototype, and to show how all cultures rest on concepts that are invalid.

Dangerous position of *art*: a custodian and energizer of dead and dying concepts. Of *History* too, insofar as it wants to lead us back to feelings we've outgrown. To feel "historically," to be "just to the past," is only possible if we are at the same time above and *beyond* it. But the danger in the empathy required is great: let the dead bury their dead, so we don't take the taint of decay ourselves.

Thesis: the death of culture inevitable. To prove it, look around. Or, better yet, just wait.

And if we tried to work without concepts, as we are in those moments of suspension before a lover or the mute discourse of objects?

What then?

Wonder and fear. In those moments of suspension there is an empathy that feels like fall: whose hands were here? What calluses, what losses? Leafing through a thirteenth-century Cistercian service book, you might stop short at a worn page, blackened and sueded at its lower right-hand corner. It is the service for the dead. How many fingers rested here? How many fingers, wet with the sweat of grief or boredom?

The empathy's main danger is to our balance and idea of self.

As part of their training, Tibetan Buddhist monks sit in meditation for hours among the corpses of the charnel ground.

Who are they when they're done this training?

The taint we smell about our hands after handling these pages comes not from the pages but from the living hands that touch them. Remember the hand: but let me wipe it first, it smells of mortality.

Each document is the product of so many contingencies, and its survival the result of so many more, that we must always marvel at what we have, while as students of the past we continue to lament what we have lost. In moments of flippancy, we may profess to be delighted at the destruction of certain material, for it lightens our labors as scholars. . . . If all the lost documents had survived, we would feel no better off: we could not be satisfied unless we had everything. And having "everything" is an impossibility.

f

I have always been haunted by things like this. Like this: the feeling of time folding over, of my own intrusion on the past, of sitting with a long-dead scribe at work and feeling my own hand start to shake in body and imagination. The writer is dead. I desire the writer. Where and what I am: anachronous, no-place. In the study, in the library.

I made . . . for the schoolroom. . . . But I opened the door to find again, in a flash, my eyes unsealed. In the presence of what I saw I reeled straight back upon my resistance.

Seated at my own table in clear noonday light I saw a person whom, without my previous experience, I should have taken at the first blush for some housemaid who might have stayed at home to look after the place and who, availing herself of rare relief from observation and of the schoolroom table and my pens, ink, and paper, had applied herself to the considerable effort of a letter to her sweetheart. There was an effort in the way that, while her arms rested on the table, her hands with evident weariness supported her head; but at the moment I took this in I had already become aware that, in spite of my entrance, her attitude strangely persisted. . . . Dark as midnight in her black dress, her haggard beauty and her unutterable woe, she had looked at me long enough to appear to say that her right to sit at my table was as good as mine to sit at hers. While these instants lasted, indeed, I had the extraordinary chill of feeling that it was I who was the intruder. And then, when I could no longer see her, I sat down at the table and began to write.

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This writing is haunted by many people and by many people's words. Below are the ones whose words appear in print. To the others, the gratitude is no less great for being silent.

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*“Until Death Do Us Part?”*THE FLESH AND BONES OF POLITICS
IN EARLY MODERN SPAIN

Samuel Sánchez y Sánchez

Every day, when the funeral procession halted, the queen repeated her painful rituals. She opened the casket, uncovered her dead husband's feet and knelt before him at length, kissing his feet with the same intense passion and tenderness as if he were alive.¹

IN AUGUST 1496, PRINCESS JUANA OF CASTILE—daughter of the powerful Catholic kings—was sent to Flanders to marry the Burgundian Archduke Philip “the Handsome,” son of Mary of Burgundy and the emperor Maximilian. This union was part of a double political arrangement designed by the Spanish monarchs and the Flemish emperor to isolate France.² Their alliance, as it turned out, would be undermined by the unexpected intervention of love and death.

The chronicler Lorenzo de Padilla recorded that upon the couple's first encounter Juana and Philip had the Castilian bishop don Diego Ramírez de Villaescusa bless their union immediately so that they could consummate their marriage without delay.³ What had originally been designed as a political alliance quickly ignited with an erotic desire that would threaten the long-term plans of both the Castilian and Flemish courts. Ten years later death intervened to modify the Spanish-Flemish strategy when on September 25, 1506, Philip died unexpectedly in the city of Burgos.⁴ Defying mortality in a manner unique within Castilian mores, Juana I disinterred her husband's cadaver almost three months later. The queen kept Philip's corpse unburied in order to stage an elaborate funeral procession exhibiting his “handsome” dead body to the Castilian people on several occasions from 1506 to 1509. During this period, Spanish and Flemish chroniclers and court officials re-created this bizarre demonstration of royal suffering in a series of documents. According to the written accounts, Juana's contemporaries were scandalized by the sovereign's expression of mourning, which was described as monstrous and beyond belief, since “never

before has a corpse been taken out of its tomb, surrounded by funeral pomp and by a mob of monks chanting funeral dirges, and then triumphantly placed on a carriage drawn by four horses."⁵ Love and death united in Philip's cadaver and allowed Juana to strategize within the Castilian political arena.

Unexpected deaths, unbridled passion, foreign courts, future kings and queens, these elements make for a good story and have formed the basis for a widely disseminated mass-market film shot in 2001 by the Spanish director Vicente Aranda. Entitled *Mad Love*, Aranda's film is only the latest modern narrative to revisit the legendary love story of the Castilian monarch and the Burgundian archduke. Emphasizing the passion of the royal couple, the Spanish director reinforces the popular portrayal of Juana as a puppet who, enslaved by lust and madness, was victimized by the political intrigues of the time. Curiously enough, Aranda's narrative of the carnal relationship between Juana and her husband ends with Philip's death. Although a final image in the film indicates that the erotic bond between the lovers does not disappear along with Philip's dead body, Aranda's account of it does. The contemporary letters, dispatches, and official documents that circulated in the epistolary space of early modern Spain upon Philip's death, however, illustrate that the erotic attachment between the lovers survived beyond the archduke's demise. Aranda's 2001 "historical romance" makes a brief reference to the royal funerary procession but edits out those other postmortem narratives, which, by re-creating, fabricating, and deforming in death the erotic tie that joined the lovers in life, further substantiate its existence and longevity.

This essay proposes to continue reading the romance between Juana and Philip, taking up Aranda's erotic narrative at the point where he abandons it: the death of the "handsome" archduke. The mourning spectacle staged by the queen has traditionally been understood as the core of a legend in which love, madness, and politics conspired to frame the royal widow as an incompetent monarch known to posterity as Juana "the Mad." Recent work has broadened this understanding of the Castilian queen and, through a more critical analysis of contemporary sources, has shed light on Juana's political agency.⁶ This perspective provides us with a less familiar story in which the Castilian sovereign developed her own means of negotiating political power. Following this line of thought, the present essay focuses on the narratives that re-created the postmortem erotic bond between Juana and her husband Philip in order to elucidate the role of the dead body. Philip's cadaver, despite its status as an ephemeral physical entity, was capable of serving as a solid political instrument

for challenging existing patterns of royal authority, protonational identity and marital status. The following pages map out how, in the context of competing political interests between Castilians and Burgundians, written representations reflect the discursive development of the relationship between Juana and the beloved dead body of her spouse. Although these accounts are composed of a mix of historical and fictitious elements, they offer us valuable insight into the construction of the dead body as “an important means of localizing a claim,”⁷ that is, as a fleeting yet enduring object that confers on death the ability to participate in the construction of agency and therefore expands the relationship between the living and the dead. As constructed by the literary imagination of her contemporaries, Juana’s legendary conjugal loyalty to her husband’s beloved cadaver offers a unique point of entry to the mutually informing relationship among erotic desire, political power, and the dearly departed in early modern Spain.⁸

The basis for this legendary love story arises, then, from the erotic discourse that subverted the political designs that motivated the couple’s first encounter. Juana’s public image, damaged by rumors of uncontrollable passion, became fodder for gossip in both Flanders and Castile and was finally transformed into the stuff of legend: the Spanish princess was portrayed as a jealous lover who not only refused to be separated from her husband but also claimed him as her exclusive possession. Juana’s compulsive behavior came to be perceived by her contemporaries as an obsessive erotic devotion that would eventually modify not only the political destiny of both Castile and Flanders but also the public power and personal life of the future queen.⁹

Juana’s lust for Philip’s body soon became politicized as a disturbing sign of the physical dependence of the Castilian heiress, and by extension of Castile itself, on foreign Burgundian physicality: the archduke’s body became an unequivocal guarantee of his wife’s presence since Juana refused to be separated from her spouse. Doubting whether the royal couple would travel together from Flanders to Spain in 1501, the chronicler Mártir de Anglería concluded that

if her husband Philip comes there’s no doubt that Juana will come too as she is hopelessly in love with her spouse. Even if she were not stimulated by the ambition of so many kingdoms and the love of her parents and all those with whom she was raised, the devotion to that man alone, whom—as they say—she passionately loves, would be enough to drag her to Spain.¹⁰

Juana's desire not to be separated from her husband had shaped the public image of the future queen as a devoted lover entranced and enslaved by an all-consuming passion.

Death, as a capricious artisan of narratives, helped consolidate and extend the perception of this physical bond between the two lovers upon Philip's sudden demise in 1506. The major chronicles bear witness to the endurance of the tie between the royal lovers in concurring that the queen remained at her dying husband's side at all times. She took personal care of him during the course of his disease, even trying his medicine herself before administering it, in case—as some rumors insinuated—it had been poisoned. When Philip died, Juana not only refused to acknowledge the dissolution of their worldly marriage but also challenged the authority of death over Philip's cadaver: "[W]hen the Queen saw the cadaver of this excellent Prince her husband, she was so distraught that she could not be wrenched away from his body by any means, nor would she allow it to be buried."¹¹ Not even death had the power to part the royal couple.

The refusal to abandon—or rather to relinquish—her partner's dead body was a moment in which the marital bond was transformed into Juana's legendary necrophilic attachment to her beloved's corpse. No longer able to speak, Philip's dead body began to be spoken by the queen's strategies of desire, which challenged the rigid structures of Castilian mourning:¹² Philip is dead, and death yields to the mourning for what has been lost; in turn, mourning necessarily evokes desire for the lost object, and desire, as Henry Staten indicates, "must aim at the continued possession of or proximity to what is desired."¹³ As the link between mourning and desire, possession allowed Juana to redirect her passion and thus perpetuate her desire by legitimating her attempt to retain the provisional object for which she as widow longed. Pragmatically, however, the queen's desire aimed to gain the sustained tenure of its object in order to reaffirm her marital rights and their accompanying political status.¹⁴

As depicted by her contemporaries' written accounts, Juana's strategy gradually constructed Philip's cadaver as both the object and the means through which her claim of passion would lead to exclusive authority over her husband's mortal remains. An obvious contradiction, however, lies at the very core of Juana's tactic: the queen's lust for her husband's body grew stronger as soon as the coveted object was no longer visible, yet that object was condemned to disappear. Dead lover, dearly departed, Philip's corpse embodied the privilege of liminality: as organic matter it necessarily succumbed to the natural order of a biological process, yet as a beloved object it was able to survive in the narrative

of Juana's desire. The attitude of the Castilian sovereign posed a challenge in that death—that is, *not-being*—was no longer merely a negatively defined state or an end in itself but rather the activator of a discursive instrument: the dead body. In transforming her partner's cadaver into a liminal and eroticized entity, the daughter of the devotedly Catholic kings hyperbolized her vows by extending her marital loyalty beyond the limits of death and religious doctrine. Simultaneously, she elaborated a fragile but resilient metaphor of power that would allow her to exercise her authority as a Castilian queen and loyal widow in an adverse political environment.

Juana's erotic devotion to Philip's body contrasted drastically with the abandoned state of the political body of her territories. Suffering from political necrosis, the kingdom of Castile began to show symptoms of physical deterioration and decay since due to "her great grief over her husband's death, or for other causes, the queen neither paid attention to her kingdom nor attempted to govern it."¹⁵ This neglect created a vacuum of power: King Fernando was absent; Juana refused to appoint a proxy to govern in her name; and, in addition, Philip's demise had revived the latent friction between the Flemish and the Spanish, provoking political unrest and social revolts. Castile soon developed into a disputed ideological territory in which the Castilians, Flemish, and Aragonese struggled for dominance. The three factions desired power, and, curiously enough, each of them claimed Philip's dead body as a locus of strategies battling for political supremacy. As a silent object of this *rapacitas corporis*, the archduke's cadaver was incorporated into the political arena of Castile as a passive subject through which Castilians, Flemish, and Aragonese articulated their competing discourses of power.

As the chronicles show, the Flemish Burgundians were the first to threaten Juana's exclusive bond with her husband's mortal remains. Only three days after the archduke's death, Mártir de Anglería reported that "according to the Flemish custom, throughout the night his servants held vigil over the corpse, which was ornamented with sumptuous garments and surrounded by tapestries, as if he were alive upon his royal throne."¹⁶ In this improvised *salle d'honneur*, Burgundian desire appropriated Philip's body and staged a splendid spectacle of mourning, which imbued the royal cadaver with a political force aimed at excluding Castilian funerary ethos.¹⁷ The luxurious setting, the magnificent corpse, and the earthly pose indicate that, as delineated by the Flemish discourse, the royal demise was clearly constructed as a Hapsburg death. This lavish display stood in direct opposition to the *De contemptu mundi* motif, which shaped the model

of Castilian death and was characterized by strict, modest, and meager rites.¹⁸ Additionally, from a Castilian perspective the Flemish tradition also failed to recognize the king's disappearance: custom would have dictated a ceremony in which the sovereign was literally stripped of his royal regalia and all other symbols of power.¹⁹ In stark contrast, the Flemish ritual celebrated the monarch's earthly permanence by emphasizing his royal insignia, contributing to an image of him as a *rex qui nunquam moritur*.²⁰ Thus, very much in line with the French royal tradition, the Flemish statement exploited the cadaver's natural liminality in order to foreground Philip's foreign identity.

Moreover, Flemish ambitions literally invaded Philip's dead body, which became in itself a physical statement of nationality when two Flemish surgeons performed the embalming of the king's cadaver and "extracted his heart so that, enclosed in a gold vase, it could be returned to his homeland and be buried next to his ancestors' ashes."²¹ The Flemish thus claimed authority by articulating their desire both from and within the archduke's dead body: the physical transgression of the monarch's corporeal integrity functioned not only as a sign of Burgundian identity but also symbolically appropriated Juana's locus of immortal desire, that is, Philip's heart. Juana's material loss of her husband's heart also suggests the symbolic loss of the mutual bond between them.²² In this sense, the fragmented dead body of Philip not only literally represented the mortal remains that had been left to Juana but also, on a symbolic level, stood for the carnal debris of her own passion, "the residue of a woman's excessive desire."²³ As both cherished relic and venerated reliquary, Philip's cadaver became simultaneously the physical vestige and the tangible memory of Juana's passion. For lack of more appropriate unguents, her lover was embalmed with lime and perfumes. After that, according to Mártir de Anglería, the archduke's dead body was "stitched back together, and all its members bound with waxed linen bandages; after that the cadaver was placed in a lead coffin, which was in turn inserted into a wooden box."²⁴ Punctures, threads, and bandages scripted in Philip's flesh the memory of the violent transgression performed on his body. At the same time, the discourse of this material reminiscence recomposed the "handsomeness" of a body that symbolically had become a visible scar in Juana's desire.

The embalming process attacked Castilian mores in a broader sense as well. As the respected doctor Juan Valverde de Amusco observed in 1556, it was considered "a very ugly thing among Spaniards to cut dead bodies into pieces."²⁵ Physical wholeness was especially important for Trastámara sovereigns such as

Juana. These monarchs commanded that when buried their bodies should be left intact as if the division of their physical body would entail the partition of the political body of the kingdom. Unlike previous Castilian dynasties in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Trastámara sovereigns rejected any sort of preservation practice for their bodies.²⁶ This attitude suggests that these monarchs were not concerned with achieving physical transcendence for their dead bodies through the conservation entailed by embalming. However, as has also been noted by both Javier Varela and José Manuel Nieto Soria, this lack of interest in bodily preservation cannot be interpreted as being parallel to the absence of enduring sovereign powers of the Trastámara monarchs. Whereas Varela sees in this attitude toward the dead body a reflection of the Erasmist ideas entering Spain at the beginning of the sixteenth century, Nieto Soria relates it to a shift in mentality that moves from a concept of death as a goal and synonym of salvation to a less transcendental and more worldly conceptualization.²⁷

The emphasis on the integrity of the Trastámara cadaver can also be related to the *De contemptu mundi* motif lingering in Castile, which saw the dead body as the detritus of the soul's earthly journey. For Trastámara royalty, taking care of a body that was already dead would entail privileging the flesh—ostensibly viewed as the corruptible source and means of sins and vices—to the detriment of the soul, thus clearly endangering its eternal salvation. The Flemish funerary practice, however, took possession of the archduke's cadaver as a tangible means of foregrounding his original Burgundian identity and thus challenging any Castilian attempt to claim him through their funerary rituals. Symbolically, this action created the illusion of a dead Burgundian monarch presiding over Castilians; literally, the embalming of Philip's corpse and the appropriation of his heart destroyed the unity of a potentially Castilian royal body.

Beyond the matter of funerary etiquette or protonational identity, the Flemish pillage of her husband's dead body was especially devastating for Juana:²⁸ for the possessive lover, it manifested the literal loss of a coveted object that belonged exclusively to the wife-widow, while for the proprietary queen it threatened her political and marital authority over her partner's corpse.

As the chroniclers indicate, after the Flemish appropriation of Philip's cadaver, the body was temporarily held at a Carthusian monastery in Burgos so that the monks could pray for the deceased monarch's soul. This spiritual ritual required that the monks take physical possession of the king's mortal remains. Juana visited the monastery on at least two occasions to distribute money and other gifts to her husband's keepers. Symbolically, however, the queen's presence

in this consecrated space can be read as the irruption of her desire into the battlefield on which first the Flemish and now the Carthusians were competing for control of the archduke's corpse.

On the evening of November 1, 1506, the Carthusian monks witnessed that, far from being extinguished by death's connotations of decay, Juana's desire to be close to her husband's body had actually been further inflamed by the loss of its object.²⁹ The queen attended the religious service at the monastery, dined with the monks, and then announced her intention to go down into the crypt where her spouse was entombed.³⁰ Though reluctant at first, the monks finally agreed to the queen's petition: Juana thus gained access to the sacred space in which the Carthusians had previously held exclusive authority over Philip's mortal remains. Once in the crypt, the physicality of Juana's passion for her partner took an unexpected shift when she commanded the bishop of Burgos to open the casket containing Philip's cadaver. The religious community was shocked by the queen's sacrilegious determination, but her authority prevailed and the astonished monks were obliged to allow the sovereign to see and even touch her husband's dead body "with no sign of distress or shedding a single tear."³¹ One of the most fanciful accounts of this event constructed the monarch's action as a demonstration of love that, tinged with lust, prompted the queen to give an order to tear open both the lead and wooden coffins and the shroud in which the corpse was wrapped. Immediately, she "started to kiss her husband's feet. She remained in this attitude for such a long time that it was necessary to wrench her from that place in a very awkward fashion by telling her: 'Your Highness may return whenever she pleases.'"³²

As this anonymous account suggests, Juana claimed authority over Philip's cadaver as a lover, thus reviving the legendary relationship of boundless desire that joined the spouses in life. Philip had died, but the queen's erotic desire highlighted that he had not ceased to exist: he continued to live because of and through Juana's desire. Additionally, the lover-queen symbolically challenged religious premises concerning the limits of death, as affirmed in the traditional wedding vow. Not only did Juana dare to lust for the forbidden, but her desire aimed literally to have and to hold its lifeless object by making visible precisely what religious rules, in conjunction with death itself, condemned to disappear: the dead body. This demand for the visibility of her husband's corpse responded to Juana's pragmatic concern for verifying that the object of her desire was still in her possession and had not been stolen, as the initial refusal of the monks to fulfill her command and some rumors had suggested.³³ By insisting on having

access to her legendarily attractive husband's body, Juana violated the boundary set not only by death but also by desire, as, in its fulfillment, Juana simultaneously lost the distance that sustained and nurtured it. Once fulfilled, the lover's desire yielded to the next step in the monarch's strategy: taking possession of Philip's body as the guarantor of political stability in Castile. The combination of the queen's worldly authority and the matrimonial privilege of her mourning enabled Juana to subvert the Carthusians' control of her husband's mortal remains. Simultaneously, then, she underscored her own condition as the dead king's wife and therefore as the reigning sovereign.

The discourse of conjugal passion allowed Juana symbolically to reconstruct her rights over the king's cadaver by building on its visibility: in displaying his corpse Juana was simultaneously displaying her authority to do so. The queen furthered this effect by taking literal possession of Philip's mortal remains on December 20, 1506, when she returned to the Carthusian monastery with the intention of fulfilling her lover's dying wish to be buried in Granada.³⁴ On this occasion, Juana's authority needed to overcome the legal obstacle posed by the bishop of Burgos, who reminded the queen that "the laws and Philip's last will itself prohibited what she wanted to do, further arguing that it was not permitted to move a corpse from its burial place within the first six months."³⁵ Juana responded by exploiting her double authority as lover and proprietary queen in order to have the coffin opened again. At the queen's request, the ambassadors of the Pope, the Emperor Maximilian, and the Catholic King Fernando, along with the bishops of Burgos, Jaén, Málaga and Mondoñedo, were convened by the queen in order to positively identify her husband's corpse.³⁶

The official ceremony of opening the royal casket responded to the legal condition that had to be met prior to the relocation of a royal cadaver. The goal of this procedure was to confirm the identity of the deceased for the person who received custody of the corpse. This ritual, however, also consolidated Juana's claim of absolute control over Philip's dead body since it was witnessed, acknowledged, ratified, and sanctified precisely by those who represented the levels of authority that the queen challenged. Consequently, violating social and religious rules but respecting legal parameters, Juana both claimed exclusive right over her husband's cadaver and legitimated that demand in the same act: Philip's dead body officially became Castilian property under Juana's ownership.

Acting as a lover in mourning, in these two monastery visits Juana not only succeeded in reestablishing an erotic bond with her spouse but also simultaneously managed to reaffirm and further consolidate her role as the proprietary

queen of Castile. By negotiating two opposite forces—her own individual desire and social and religious conventions—Juana was asserting her rights and fully appropriating the king's body: the Castilian monarch was literally recognized as the legitimate owner of a decaying collection of flesh and bones that, "wrapped in bandages impregnated with unguents and embalmed with thick lime looked like . . . [it was] made of chalk dust."³⁷ Yet, somewhat ironically, on a symbolic level this perishable object embodied the essence of Juana's authority as widow-lover-proprietary queen. The sovereign's strategies successfully institutionalized the erotic attachment to her spouse, granted official status to her refusal to be separated from him, and defused Burgundian desire. Philip's cadaver was now under Juana's—and thus Castile's—exclusive control.

From this moment on, Juana began a funerary peregrination, which fulfilled the prophecy of an old Galician commoner, who had predicted that the archduke would "wander in Castile more days dead than alive."³⁸ On December 23, 1506, the secretary Lope Conchillos reported to the Castilian Royal Council that "the queen departed . . . on Sunday one hour after dusk: she is taking with her the King's body, which by the way," insisted the secretary, "doesn't smell like civet. We haven't been able to convince her Majesty to postpone the trip or to abandon the body."³⁹ Thus began the funeral procession in which Juana exhibited to the Castilians her husband's mortal remains placed in a casket embellished with silk and golden ornaments and diverse royal insignia. The coffin was placed on a carriage drawn by four horses brought from Frigia and escorted by soldiers and representatives of both the Church and the nobility in a sort of traveling show from December 1506 to February 1509.⁴⁰

During this period, the queen's public display of mourning became a powerful statement of possession whose aesthetics oscillated between the phantasmagoric and the royal. Surrounded by funerary and monarchical paraphernalia, Juana reaffirmed her connection to the dead king in a manner that emphasized the spectatorial condition inherent in public mourning, which, as Henry Staten indicates, "is capable of stimulating the affect of mourning of the audience because mourning 'itself' is already spectatorial and specular."⁴¹ Juana's bond to her spouse thus became the leading premise of a theatrical performance in which the intended audience had the chance not only to react to this event but also to actively participate by collaborating in the construction of royal authority. In this way, the archduke's corpse engaged its audience in a discourse of mutual referentiality; that is, as Juana elaborated her performance she was also constructing her main "actor" as king and her audience as vassals.

The queen's strategy, then, validated her legal authority not only by exhibiting her husband's cadaver but also by requiring her audience's acknowledgment and confirmation of her enactment.

The prop on which her show of excessive passion relied allowed Juana to display a narrative that, in addition to staging "the confrontation of a specific and active woman's desire with a social or symbolic order that represents no place for such desire,"⁴² also positioned Philip's dead body as a transitional link that served to reconcile the apparently contradictory relationship between the religious sentiment of mourning and worldly erotic passion.⁴³ Juana thus managed to create a place for a strategy that brought together royal authority (she successfully exerted her influence on her husband's cadaver over social and religious mores), political power (she imposed her own agenda over that of rival parties), and erotic desire (the element that grounded and secured the success of the previous ones). The Castilian sovereign had created a discourse composed of three elements joined together by a matter that, ironically, was decaying: Philip's dead body.

Over the course of three years, Juana extended both her husband's visibility and her own through the proud exhibition of her most precious possession.⁴⁴ She refused to bury his cadaver while continuing to perform daily funerary rituals as if he had just died and thereby maintained a lack of closure that kept the king in a state of limbo between life and death.⁴⁵ In the eyes of her contemporaries, the queen was still the victim of an obsessive passion for her husband, which stigmatized her and qualified her bereavement as a clear case of madness. However, imbued with erotic desire, Juana's mourning was invested with an instrumental value and thus became more of an active process connected to life's worldly concerns than a tribute to death itself. The sovereign further cemented that connection by constructing this beloved dead body as her most valuable treasure, watched over by "almost 100 Palatine soldiers who, in day and night shifts, keep continuous guard over Philip's cadaver, at the ready to squelch any sign of disturbance."⁴⁶ In staging this elaborate procession under the guise of a continuous mourning ritual, Juana displayed her own authority to violate tradition while keeping alive her connection with her beloved spouse. She created an instrumental fiction that nurtured the illusion of a perpetual life of death, a fiction that revolved around "that other death which is endless death, proof of the absence of ending."⁴⁷

Thus the "handsome" Philip became an errant corpse wandering through an invented space. By being exposed, the deceased king simultaneously

participated in the worlds of the living and of the dead since he did not fully belong to either. As an embodied oxymoron, the king's traveling cadaver opens up a double reading that both stems from and resembles the fact that the Castilian court, unlike other European courts of the time, was still itinerant. This nomadic wake strategically allowed the queen to erase any Burgundian trace from the deceased king because, although Philip had never seen most of his vassals in life, it seemed that Juana was determined for them to witness the irrefutable proof of his presence.⁴⁸ The formerly Flemish body, now a Castilian corpse, was on a postmortem campaign trail through the territories of the kingdom. This terrestrial journey planned by the queen delayed a subsequent one: due to the unburied status of her husband's body, Juana was preventing Philip from continuing the journey to his final spiritual destination as he had quite clearly not been "put to rest." In this light, the royal lovers became political and spiritual outlaws challenging both the religious and the political status of death.

This combination constructs the king's cadaver as a physical and conceptual border; a kind of corporeal hinge joining death and life that insinuates the existence of a third body of the king, or at least the possible existence of a third space, which oscillates between the two categories proposed by Ernst Kantorowicz: the potentially mortal physical body and the corporate one.⁴⁹ In this particular case, in their positions as spectators the Castilians were not appropriating a live body but a cadaver. Therefore, in its transformation from a tangible object to a bodiless entity, Philip's corpse may be understood as constituting a third intermediate category that served as a material link between the physical living body that died and the abstract corporate body that represented the idea of an immortal monarchy.⁵⁰ Floating, then, between the physical and the conceptual, this third royal body struggles between the apparently impossible condition of being and that of not being precisely because, due to its inherently self-consuming nature, it cannot "be": the reaffirmation of its own nature denies its very existence.

Narrative, however, substantiates this third body's novel position: it exists in the letters and official documents that circulated in Castile in conjunction with the queen's mourning. While only some Castilian vassals were in direct contact with the king's dead body, these written accounts extended the view of the corpse to all other royal subjects who were not connected either to the physical or the corporate bodies but rather to a malleable textual third body of the king at the service of rival political agendas.⁵¹

An eccentric social action in itself, Juana's mourning performance reinforced its own marginality in three ways. First, it took place along both geographical and temporal margins, as the queen intentionally conducted the funeral procession through rural areas because, as she herself stated, "it was not appropriate for a widow to enter either cities or important places with the intention of being seen."⁵² In addition, the monarch always traveled "by night with the objective of not being seen, giving the excuse that it is unseemly for widows to go out under the sunlight, mainly when traveling, once the sun of their husbands has been extinguished."⁵³ Second, since the queen and the deceased king became an inseparable unit, Philip's dead body served as a tangible political border that determined the location of the Castilian court and the royal house. Finally, Juana staged a mourning process based on a marginal use of her husband's cadaver, which ratified its own existence as a liminal space: it served as a movable marker of distinction where, together with the concepts of royal authority and protonational identity, marital status must also be negotiated through the king's dead body.

The political weight of these increasingly lighter mortal remains became apparent between 1507 and 1508. In this period of time, the visibility of Philip's cadaver frustrated the attempt of Juana's father, King Fernando of Aragon, to marry his daughter to the English monarch Henry VII, who saw in the fecundity of the royal widow a guarantee of dynastic continuity. As Bethany Aram has pointed out, Fernando's ultimate goal was to strip his daughter Juana of power and send Philip's body back to the Carthusian monastery so that, as determined by Queen Isabel's will, he himself could gain control of Castile.⁵⁴

As the marriage negotiations progressed, so did the frustration of King Fernando, whose authority on this matter was challenged by the fact that "the said queen, my daughter, carries the body of her husband, King Philip, with her continuously."⁵⁵ "Until now," the desperate Fernando continues to complain in a letter to his ambassador in England, "it has not been possible to get her to bury her husband's body. . . . I have done everything imaginable to persuade the queen [and] . . . I have not been able to convince her, for each time I ask she tells me 'not so soon.'"⁵⁶ Canceling out Fernando's desire to control the dead body of his son-in-law, Philip's cadaver became, through Juana's manipulation, the unavoidable obstacle for preventing a change in the queen's marital status and, by extension, of political power in Castile. The ambiguous position in which Philip's cadaver appeared to be suspended was thus extended to Juana's marital

status: if by remaining unburied Philip's dead body hovered over the border between two states—life and death—so did Juana's matrimonial identity oscillate between widowhood and wedlock. Thus, it was the union of love and death in the ephemeral materiality of this beloved dead body that allowed Juana to succeed in her intention. As a reinforcement of their intimate bond, the lovers' legend of passion cooperated in order to allow Juana to exercise authority over her husband's mortal remains. In turn this control allowed her to guard her widowhood, prevent the sexual appropriation of her own body, and by extension protect the patrimonial body of her kingdom.⁵⁷

Juana's public display of her desire ended in February 1509 upon her imprisonment, which was dictated by her father's order. In her seclusion, she continued to exert her authority over her husband's cadaver, which she would not abandon under any circumstances.⁵⁸ Juana kept alive the tangible fiction she had created until August 1525, when her son, Emperor Charles V, broke the physical connection between his parents by moving Philip's remains to Granada. The final rupture of the bond between the lovers at this moment suggests that Juana's strategies gradually weakened and lost effectiveness as the dead body lost the public visibility that had been precisely what enabled the sovereign to sustain her own agenda. The disappearance of the queen's discourse parallels, or follows, that of the dead body that nurtured it, a royal corpse that, along the lines of the *De contemptu mundi* doctrine, served as a carnal metaphor joining the transitory nature of both power and human flesh. Although by means of this definitive separation Juana's afterlife romance came to an end, the emperor could not break the authoritative status that the legendary bond acquired within the collective memory of Spaniards, first in the sixteenth century and now at the beginning of the twenty-first.

The written narratives that populated the Castilian imaginary created their own fictitious dead body by imagining the biological one. Yet by doing so their authors were not only acknowledging the erotic bond between the living and dead monarchs but were also voicing and substantiating it both for their contemporary audience and for us today. In the service of specific interests, some of these extraordinarily imaginative narratives cemented Juana's public image as a mad queen subjected to an exaggerated passion and thus highlighted her marginal condition as a sexual transgressor. Yet, even then, and despite their tone of disapproval, by incorporating Philip's cadaver into their own political discourse these narratives implicitly recognized the strategies that the sovereign's desire had woven through and around her partner's dead body.

In this sense, the textual representations of Juana's erotic bond to her husband provide a narrative process that invites us to interrogate our assumptions and critical approaches to desire, loss, and death. The queen's strategy first draws our attention toward a reconfiguration of the value of a dead body. Despite its status as an inherently perishable object, Juana was able to construct the corpse as a site of political negotiation involving both the living and the dead. The limits that separate them were blurred by the convergence of passion and death in Philip's cadaver, endowing this fleeting object with the conceptual elasticity that allowed it to embody the apparently paradoxical relationship among power, erotic desire, and mortality. Competing desires, then, infused Philip's dead body with the ability to signify through its very guise of passivity, positing a reconciliation of the corpse's own ephemeral materiality with its capability to serve as the embodiment of intangible concepts such as power and authority.

In addition, as a model that counteracts the experience of an absolute loss, Juana's unique case of unrequited love complicates the relationship between margin and center. In a profoundly religious world, the instrumentalization of Philip's dead body was literally displaced to the periphery of the sphere of power. Symbolically, however, this cadaver materializes a liminal dimension in which nothing can exist except for the possibility to express a desire banned in the center. It may well be precisely due to this marginalization, however, that Juana was able to carry out her erotic mourning enterprise. Perhaps because of its marginal visibility, its impossible existence, Philip's dead body emerges as a third body of the king, which enabled his spouse to influence the dynastic politics of Castile.

A challenging approach to the notion of death is suggested, then, by Juana's legendary attachment to her partner's dead body: if immortality was once an exclusively divine prerogative, the suspension and denial of death was now contingent on a mortal woman's desire. After all, as the voice of Secretary Lope Conchillos reminds us, this was a woman who would simply not abandon her husband's "holy body, . . . as her intention is to reveal in death how much she had loved it in life."⁵⁹ Thus, Juana's story can be read not only as a narrative of insanity magnified by power but also as the legacy of an impassioned monarch whose desire for her deceased husband was able to reformulate relations of power in early modern Spain by means of the most ephemeral materiality of all: a dead body.

NOTES

1. Quoted in Sanz y Ruiz de la Peña 1939, 183.
2. The cornerstone of this strategic move was the arranged marriage of Prince Juan, Juana's brother and heir to the Spanish crown, and Margaret of Austria, Philip's sister. These two instrumental marriages formed a logistical vise that gripped the Gallic country in a twofold manner: France would find itself pressured both geographically, amid Spain, Flanders, and England, and dynastically, as the French dynasty of the Valois would be menaced by this double union between the Castilian Trastámaras and Flemish Hapsburgs.
3. Lorenzo de Padilla (1846, 8.40) reports that the official ceremony took place two days later.
4. In fact, love and death had already altered the political arena of early modern Europe by canceling out the main bastion of the political alliance between the Flemish and the Spanish. Only six months after his marriage, the Spanish Prince Juan died in October 1497, due to what chronicles refer to as an "exacerbated sexual ardor," which gave rise to the legend that constructed him as the "prince who died of love." Beyond the personal loss for the Catholic kings, the prince's sudden death also entailed a political loss for the whole country, since along with the prince's body death had also taken away "the hope of all Spain" (Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 9, epistle 182).
5. Ibid., vol. 10, epistle 332.
6. Among these studies, the groundbreaking work by Aram merits special attention. In her recently translated book *Juana the Mad: Sovereignty and Dynasty in Renaissance Europe* (2005), she focuses on late medieval Spanish constitutional thought, the problem of female sovereignty, princely courts and households, and cultural constructions of madness in order to complete an enlightening study of the Castilian monarch. I would like to express my gratitude to Bethany Aram for her willingness to share with me her knowledge and expertise in these areas.
7. Verdery 1999, 28. From an anthropological point of view, Verdery has explored the significance of the cadaver in the context of the search for national identity in Eastern Europe.
8. I am approaching Juana's erotic desire as a sort of *cupiditas oculorum*, or inclination of her will toward the visual pleasure and symbolic enjoyment of the desired object. In defining erotic desire I am borrowing from Shuger (1993), who has pointed out that "most recent work on the body tends to presuppose that erotic desire (the longing for union with the beloved) is sexual desire (genital arousal). . . . Erotic desire [in the Renaissance] is physical, but primarily affects the upper body; it is engendered in the eyes and dwells in the heart" (271–72).
9. After Prince Juan's death in 1497, the legitimate heir to the crown was Isabel, the eldest daughter of the Catholic kings. However, she died in 1498 after giving birth to Miguel, who immediately took his mother's place as heir to the crowns of both Castile and Aragon. Miguel died a mere two years later, and in 1502 Juana was proclaimed heir to the throne of Castile and Aragon. After the death of the Catholic Queen Isabel in

1504, Juana officially became proprietary queen of Castile. Her mother's will recognized Juana as the legitimate heir; however, it also specified that if the princess were not in Castile at the moment of her mother's death or were incapacitated or unwilling to govern the kingdom her father, Fernando of Aragon, would govern in her name until the coming of age of Charles, Juana's first son and the future emperor Charles V.

10. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 9, epistle 222.

11. Padilla 1846, 8.150. Regarding the queen's refusal to abandon Philip's dead body, an anonymous chronicler (Anonymous 1952, 588) records that when the queen "saw her husband, the most handsome man in the world, die before her eyes . . . she began to kiss him, and I believe that she would have remained there next to his dead body as long as she were alive."

12. One example of these strict Castilian funerary regulations is found in *Pragmática de luto y cera*, promulgated by the Catholic kings on January 10, 1502, in which the monarchs went so far as to regulate the number of candles that could be shown at funerals. These could not exceed twenty-five, as "any excess regarding this issue was not in the benefit and relief of the departed souls since these ways of showing pain were invented by those who did not believe in resurrection and who thought that souls died along with bodies" (quoted in Gómez Imaz 1890, 31–32).

13. Staten 1995, 2.

14. In November 1505, due to her alleged mental instability, Juana's political authority had already been limited by the Treaty of Salamanca, which established a tripartite government for Castile under Juana, her husband Philip, and her father, King Fernando of Aragon. In June 1506, though nominally retaining the status of proprietary queen, Juana was removed from power by the Villafáfila Accord, arranged by Philip and King Fernando, which declared Juana incapable of governing the kingdom and recognized Philip as king of Castile. Fernando temporarily withdrew to his kingdom of Aragon.

15. Padilla 1846, 8.151.

16. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol.10, epistle 316. According to another chronicler, Alonso de Santa Cruz (1951, 2.59), after King Philip died "his servants took his body and following the French tradition placed it on a stage that was made for the occasion in one big room in the house of the Constable where the King was staying at the moment of his death. They dressed him up lavishly and with very rich garments and they seated him on a throne, as if he were alive. They kept him that way for all of that following night in which many monks were present in order to sing the appropriate funerary dirges." The insistence of chroniclers on the fact that Philip abandoned this world as a Burgundian king suggests that those Castilians present in this peculiar funerary ceremony must have experienced an intense feeling of strangeness in their own land when they witnessed this Francophile "royal council."

17. In the context of French royal funerary tradition, Giesey (1960) explains, "the *salle d'honneur*, occasionally called the *salle de parament*, refers to a chamber not decorated with mourning colors, in which the effigy was displayed, as opposed to the *salle de deuil* or *chambre du trespas* draped in black where the body, or the coffin, was displayed" (4, n. 16). The ornamentation of the room where Philip's wake takes place foreshadows that of

King Francis I of France, who died in 1547. The effigy of the French king was placed in a hall that "was lavishly decorated with hangings of blue velvet and cloth of gold, and of tapestries figured with the acts of the Apostles" (4). The luxurious Burgundian funerary display parallels, then, that of the French tradition. Curiously enough, however, the Burgundian version of the *salle d'honneur* went even farther, reaching an incomparable realism as the corpse itself was substituted for the effigy of the king.

18. The rigor of Castilian mourning is illustrated by the religious service for the death of Prince Juan, which took place in Ávila on October 19, 1496. The chronicler Mártir de Anglería (1953, vol. 9, epistle 182) indicates that the funeral "was performed according to traditional Spanish customs, which dictated that all the members of the court be dressed in coarse woolen cloth."

19. As Martín (1991, 22) indicates, the disappearance of a Castilian monarch was symbolized by the destruction of his weapons and the withdrawal of his symbols of power: the crown, scepter, and sword.

20. As defined by Kantorowicz (1957, 314–450), this concept is characterized by the interaction of three variables: dynastic continuity/perpetuity, the corporate character of the crown, and the immortality of the *dignitas regis*. See also Giesey 1960, 177–92.

21. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 316.

22. Within the complex system of meaning ascribed to each organ, the heart has enjoyed a long tradition as an unequivocal symbol of love. As Stevens (1997, 277) reminds us, "since the early Middle Ages Christian iconography has used the heart in poetry and the visual arts to represent one of the most profound of human emotions."

23. Kamuf 1982, xiv.

24. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 316.

25. Quoted in Varela 1990, 18.

26. Curiously enough, upon her death in 1555, Juana's dead body was embalmed by Dr. Santa Cara (Rodríguez Villa 1874, 398).

27. Varela 1990, 17–19; Nieto Soria 1993, 115–19.

28. Offering a curious analogy, the royal body was not the only space violated by acts of Flemish pillage; the royal house was also subjected to such actions. Exhausted by Philip's excessive favors to his supporters, at his death the royal budget could not meet the clause in the king's will by which he commanded the payment of the whole Flemish entourage that had accompanied him to Spain. In regard to this lack of solvency, the response of the queen was to ask the Flemish to pray for the king's soul. As the social rejection and political tension increased, the Flemish were eager to abandon Castile. Out of desperation, they began to sack the royal house, stealing jewelry, dishes, tapestries, and all sorts of household objects, including the archduke's wardrobe, in order to sell them off quickly and finance their trips back to Flanders.

29. The queen's statement of sovereignty over her husband's corpse on November 1 carries particular significance in Spain, since this day is dedicated to the cult of the dead.

30. Zurita 1991, 4.114–15.

31. Quoted in Mariana 1894, 3.92.

32. Anonymous 1952, 589. The fact that Juana not only saw but also touched her husband's cadaver reinforced the striking visual component of her behavior because "the spectacular," as Cazelles (1994, 62) has pointed out, "is no longer a matter of *looking* at the saint's body, but of *touching* it, suggesting a treatment of the sacred focusing on the protagonist's corporeal rather than spiritual identity."

33. Since it was said that the Flemish had stolen and sold Philip's clothes and other personal possessions, the queen feared that they had also stolen her husband's cadaver. Rumors quickly sprang up that indicated that along with the heart the Flemish had taken the entire body to Flanders as well (Mariana 1894, 3.92).

34. As Aram (2005, 88–89) indicates, with this action Juana not only fulfilled the dead king's last wish but also secured the successive rights to the Castilian throne for their son, the future Charles V.

35. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 324.

36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Sandoval 1955, 1.29.

39. "Carta de Lope Conchillos, secretario del Rey Católico, a Miguel Pérez de Almazán, secretario del Consejo de sus Altezas" (Burgos, 23 de diciembre de 1506). Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid), Colección Salazar A–12, fol. 86. As the *Tesoro de la lengua castellana o española* (1611) illustrates, civet is a kind of liquid secreted by a cat from the Indies. After proper treatment, it acquires an extremely fine smell and therefore is very valuable.

40. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 324.

41. Staten 1995, 42.

42. Kamuf 1982, xviii. Kamuf has articulated this idea in the context of the relationship between Abelard and Héloïse.

43. According to Aram 2005, the presence of the Carthusian monks who accompanied Juana and her husband's coffin also contributed to reconciling dynastic and devotional interests, as they helped her "harmonize the competing demands of ascetic withdrawal and royal display" (170).

44. In terms of this desire for visibility, Philip's mortal remains were exposed on two more occasions. On May 1, 1507, in the middle of an open field, the queen "ordered her husband's cadaver to be taken out of its coffin during the night, under the weak light of several torches that the violence of the wind threatened to put out. Some carpenters, brought in for this purpose, opened both the wooden and lead boxes. After contemplating her husband's dead body, she called the nobles as witnesses, ordered the coffin to be closed again and to be carried on men's shoulders to the village of Hornillos" (Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 339). A less colorful account corresponds to the opening of the casket on August 24, 1507, when Mártir de Anglería very succinctly informs us that "after having her husband's casket opened again at midnight on August 24th, the queen and her entourage—preceded by the funeral carriage drawn by four horses—began the trip from the small village of Hornillos towards Tórtoles" (epistle 359).

45. Ibid., epistle 324. This chronicler corroborates Juana's insistence on this aspect when ten months later he asserts that "the same guard shifts were still organized over

the King's dead body and the same ecclesiastical ceremonies were performed as if he has just died" (epistle 364).

46. Ibid., epistle 332.

47. Blanchot 1981, 100.

48. Aram 2005, 97.

49. According to Kantorowicz 1957, 193–232, the king had both a mortal physical body and a corporate body, which were united during life but were separated at the moment of death. The king's physical body could suffer from disease and decay, but his corporate body never died and was appropriated by the community.

50. As Aram (2005, 89) points out, the descriptions of Juana's "excessive love" for Philip also allowed his contemporaries to perpetuate the fiction of the king's two bodies.

51. These letters and official documents were written by chroniclers, court officials, ambassadors, and several monarchs, who were exchanging their impressions regarding the political situation of Castile after Philip's demise. This written corpus served as propaganda for the rival parties, which found in the archduke's corpse a textual means of channeling their own political interests. These documents provided a textual space for claiming control over Philip's dead body. By turning the archduke's cadaver into fictional matter, Juana's rivals were performing an act of literary appropriation aimed at counteracting the queen's model of literal possession: whereas the flesh and bones were falling into decay, the ink and paper perpetuated the presence of Philip's corpse, thus consolidating control over its significance.

52. Santa Cruz 1951, 2.91.

53. Mártir de Anglería 1953, vol. 10, epistle 359.

54. Additionally, the Catholic king could not allow Philip's body to be buried in Granada before he himself was interred there as this would link the newly conquered kingdom to Castile rather than Aragon. This move would symbolically favor the dynastic rights of Juana's son Charles (Aram 2005, 98–99).

55. "Carta del rey Fernando el Católico al Dr. Puebla" (Finales de 1507–principios de 1508). Archivo General de Simancas, *PR* 54:38 (i–ii).

56. "Carta del rey Fernando el Católico a su embajador en Inglaterra" (18 de abril de 1508). Reproduced in Gómez de Fuensalida 1907, 437.

57. The unburied dead body of Philip also served as the visible obstacle that frustrated the marriage expectations of Gastón de Foix and the duke of Calabria, who also expressed their desire to marry Juana. See Aram 2005, 97–99.

58. Philip's corpse even became the *sine qua non* condition for an eventual plan of evacuation because, as the Catholic king's secretary indicates, in such a case "it would be necessary to take the body of the king, Our Majesty, . . . with her Highness, as it is not possible to do otherwise." "Carta del marqués de Denia a Carlos I" (10 de agosto de 1518). Reproduced in Rodríguez Villa 1874, 95–96.

59. "Carta de Lope Conchillos, secretario del Rey Católico, a Miguel Pérez de Almazán, secretario del Consejo de sus Altezas" (Burgos, 23 de diciembre de 1506). Real Academia de la Historia (Madrid), Colección Salazar A–12, fol. 86v.

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Dead Children

BEN JONSON'S EPITAPH "ON MY FIRST SONNE"

Silke-Maria Weineck

IF WRITING ABOUT DEAD LOVERS is a way to sustain or create erotic bonds to the past, writing about dead children appears to be more complicated. As almost the entirety of the literary tradition tells us, human erotic bonds are not meant to last, and even their celebrations tend to have their end written into them. The lover may live, but love and its death belong together, by tacit or explicit acknowledgment. David Halperin suggests elsewhere in this volume that the dead lover is the best lover—yes, I would add, if only according to the conventions of narrative, where if perhaps not lovers then love itself is always headed toward extinction. Whenever we read about moments of fulfillment, we are conscious that they have been written in retrospect, nostalgia hovering. And since representation unavoidably implies and imposes distance, the most ecstatic erotic union is overshadowed by future perfect, that most melancholy of tenses: when I will have written about this moment, it will have been so wonderful.

Children, however, are figures of futurity. For all the talk of lovers' merged souls, the father who gazes on his son sees himself in a way that does not apply to the lover's gaze.¹ The child's otherness differs from the lover's otherness. Erotic and paternal love may have an equal potential for narcissism, but there is no trace of symmetry in the father/child relationship. We might want our lovers to love us as we love them, but our children? No, because we cannot offer them what they can offer us, certainly not at the same time. In general, children and parents inhabit different temporal trajectories. Thus, we may want to share our lovers' deaths, but who would want a child to share his?

The death of the lover, then, does not affect the story of love—on the contrary, in many regards, it fulfills it. The death of the child, by contrast, is always a breach of contract, a narrative deviation, no matter how frequently children died in the periods to which this volume is devoted. There is no room

for nostalgia here, since the fulfillment of fatherhood presumes the *father's* death. Perhaps for that very reason, it appears as if fatherhood tends to articulate itself most prominently at the death of the child. In literature, what we know of the strength of paternal love we know from laments. There are uncounted poems extolling the virtues and attractions of the living lover, but how many are there celebrating the living child? Lamenting the dead one, by contrast, has a long and rich tradition, from David mourning Absalom to Mallarmé mourning Anatole and beyond. But what is the status of such texts? What work do they do? How do they differ from texts that speak of the dead lover? Needless to say, there can be no single answer across time and periods, but I want to suggest that the death of the child makes fatherhood speakable or writeable because, for all its violence, it resolves the constitutive tensions of the paternal position and changes it into something quite different.

The topos of the dead child has fascinated me ever since I began to work on paternal subjectivity. Go to any canonical text or myth that involves fathers and there they are. Dead children everywhere. And if they aren't dead, then they are at least threatened by death. The death of the child is not only the central motif in father-son narratives—"only," as if that weren't noteworthy enough—but it seems to function as nothing less than the condition of their possibility. One should hasten to add that this is only the case as long as these are, if such a distinction may be allowed, the father's stories, told in the father's voice, articulating paternity rather than filiality. The sons are more eloquent, speak more freely, and triumph and mourn more easily. Sons' narratives abound, and they come in all shapes—it is only the fathers who must write in, with, and through blood.

Substituting word for child, however, poems about the son who died—daughters, traditionally, do not promise life beyond death to their fathers—can take recourse in an ancient metaphoric nexus that links writing to procreation and both to immortality. This association is at least as old as the association of writing and death. We find both in Plato's *Phaedrus*, the filial logoi and the dead letters, but Plato already departs from the tradition. Toward the end of the dialogue, in the famous discussion of writing and memory, writing emerges as a bastard who "knows not to whom to speak or not to speak; when ill-treated or unjustly reviled it always needs its father to help it." Speech, on the contrary, is "the legitimate brother of this bastard one . . . is written with intelligence in the mind of the learner, which is able to defend itself and knows to whom it should speak, and before whom to be silent."² For the most part and for the longest

time, however, it is writing, not speaking, that will appear as a superior form of begetting, precisely because of its apparent immutability. Here is Montaigne's ironic comment.

[There] are few men given unto Poesie, that would not esteeme it for a greater honour, to be the fathers of *Virgils Aenidos*, than the godliest boy in *Rome*, and that would not rather endure the losse of the one that the perishing of the other.³

How can a poem, an epic, or an essay be superior to a living, breathing child? More important, how is it that the metaphoric substitution of child and work is so common as to slip right by us when it occurs? Begetting or raising a child and writing a poem are vastly different processes. What is the *tertium comparationis* here? Creation itself, the process of making external what was a part of oneself, the promise of deathlessness? All of that, to be sure, but writing has the advantage if only because it does not need the mother, it remains uncontaminated by what we might now call her genes, and she is not there to make claims on her own. The written word is not beholden to her flesh, which is, as not only the Christian tradition tells us over and over again, matter itself.

If overcoming death, in this context, is also overcoming matter, then the dead child can be transformed into text with no remainder, or no remainder that seems to matter. Ben Jonson's famous poem on his first son performs all these moves—it loses the mother, it celebrates writing, it gives the finger to death, and it certainly provided Jonson (or Jonson's name) with the kind of afterlife no living, breathing child could have given him. Before I get to Ben Jonson's dead son, though, I want to back up and say a few words about fatherhood “as such,” however sketchy. “As such” has to be in quotation marks because fatherhood, like all human relations, both generates and escapes theory, structure, abstraction. If the Austrian writer Arthur Schnitzler is right and parental love is always unhappy,⁴ then all fathers are unhappy in their own way. At the same time, fatherhood is not simply an institution among others; it may very well be the Ur-institution when it comes to human affairs—not simply the legalization and formalization of a given physical relation but the very model of legalization and formalization in the social realm. Fatherhood, after all, can *only* be posited, never proven (or at least this used to be the case until DNA analysis came along, a truly fascinating development, but one that precedes the periods I am concerned with here, so we can forget about it), and that old Latin

saw, *mater certissima*, *pater semper incertus* (the mother is most certain, the father is always uncertain) exerts its sly force throughout history and across the most divergent discourses.

Second, the father-son relationship (when it comes to daughters, the dynamics are very different) is characterized by a great number of paradigmatic dialectic binaries. To the extent to which fatherhood posits a biological relationship in establishing a legal one, it contains all the tension between body and law or, in by now old-fashioned terms, nature and culture. To the extent to which sons replace their fathers in their name, fatherhood negotiates identity and otherness, makes of children an extension, an externalization, even a prosthesis of self. And the children's claim to that identity depends on the extinction of the very self they are replacing. Thus, Aristotle speaks of biological children as *heteros autos* (another self),⁵ and Donald Hall addresses his newborn in a poem as "my son, my executioner." Fatherhood, then, signifies or quite literally embodies repetition and difference, and both in equal force. Third, and of course related to these, fatherhood is the exemplary relationship of temporality within the social; the passage of historical time—at least in its continuity—is measured in generations, for example, in the biblical series of "begats" that so obsessively serves to close the gaps between the more dramatically significant episodes.

It is for all these reasons that death is, or must be, such a constant theme whenever it comes to father-son stories—death alone can relax the tension inherent in those relations, and hence make speakable what is lost in their contemplation—affect, emotion, or, to stop dancing around the word, love. So perhaps the best beloved child is not the one who returns, as the story of the prodigal son wants to claim, but is, after all, the one who is lost forever, the dead one, the one who won't compete, won't take the father's woman, won't take the father's place, and won't disappoint him ever again. As all parents know, your first child moves you one generation closer to death, and while breeding may almost always be a gamble on immortality, its most immediate effect is just as often a heightened consciousness of death to come.

To repeat, then, the scenes of fatherhood are littered with children either dead, presumed dead, or barely escaping death—Isaac, Absalom, Jesus; Zeus, Oedipus, Theseus; Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's son, about whose death the dry and polemical Lessing wrote the most moving letter; the unnamed child that dies in his father's arms in Goethe's *Earl King*, the murdered infant in Kleist's *Earthquake in Chili*; Mallarmé's Anatole in the poem that bears the boy's name, Cuchulain's son, whom the king slays, unknowingly, in Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*,

the child that burns through the “Dream of the Burning Child” of Freud’s *Traumdeutung*. To be sure, I am mixing stories, periods, and genres in an irresponsible way here to make my point, and all of these narratives deserve and demand careful individual analysis. In each case, the child’s death—or its threat—serves different functions, is embedded into a nexus of different concerns, embodies different structures. After all, the dead child is always the exception, perhaps the privileged figure of the exceptional itself, of time misbehaving, of reversal.

But here is Ben Jonson’s epigram.

XLV. On my first Sonne

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
 My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov’d boy,
 Seven yeeres tho’wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
 Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
 O, could I loose all father, now. For why
 Will man lament the state he should envie?
 To have so soone scap’d worlds, and flesh’s rage,
 And, if no other miserie, yet age?
 Rest in soft peace, and, ask’d, say here doth lye
 Ben. Jonson his best piece of poetrie.
 For whose sake, hence-forth, all his vowes be such,
 As what he loves may never like too much.⁶

When a friend first sent me this text, I very nearly burst into tears, convinced that I had just read the most beautiful poem about a dead beloved I had ever seen. I empathized with the father, I briefly saw my own children dead (a vision whose recurrence appears to be a fixed price of parenthood), and I was simultaneously consoled for the imagined loss by poetry that seemed to settle on grief past and grief to come like a comforting blanket.

When I read it again, in preparation for writing this essay, the smooth language of a grief borne well, perfectly aestheticized and hence both stunning and contained, no longer appeared to cover the same grief raw and screaming, as it had seemed at first, but struck me as sentimental and strikingly narcissistic. This reversal may have been due to the same stylistic features that make Stephen Booth talk of “arch etymological pedantry,” “ostentatiously artful . . . metaphor[s],” “the poem’s diverting display of wit,” and its “showy effects,”⁷ which may turn mourning into altogether too brilliant a performance.

But there is something else yet, a quality more disturbing, that makes “On my first Sonne” not the most beautiful but a most sinister poem of loss, casually murderous, an act of lyrical filicide that passes itself off as an act of mourning. Paradoxically, it is precisely its ominous qualities that save it from what may be its pretensions: it is both beautiful and murderous; it exposes its machinery, making it conflicted and conflicting, broken and jagged, and, in being so clearly mendacious, honest enough.

Look at the first line: “Farewell, thou son of my right hand, and joy.” The boy had been named after him, Benjamin, and Benjamin, from the Hebrew *biny mîn*, means “son of my right hand.” The biblical Benjamin, of course, is also his father Jakob’s best beloved, the youngest (rather than the first) of twelve sons, and to sit by the father’s right hand is the position of honor. Knowing all that, readers are called upon, I think, to paraphrase the first line as “Farewell, my son Benjamin, my joy, my best beloved.” But the substitution of meaning for name, the syntax, and the delayed caesura that appears to emphasize that “joy” has been cut off, opens the line to many other readings. Thus, we might understand it to mean “Farewell and joy to you, my son,” for instance, a good Christian reading that would anticipate the *vanitas* topos, reminding us that death is the portal to a greater joy than earthly existence holds. This pious gloss may indeed hover over the surface; it would certainly be a familiar and comforting thought to an early-seventeenth-century reader. But we may also read the line to say “Farewell, child of my right hand and child of my joy,” a reading that sexualizes begetting and would, perhaps, write the absent mother back into the poem. Or not, for the joys of the right hand do not usually involve women at all. I don’t want to push the masturbatory reading, in part because I do not know whether the charming French allusion contained in “books read with one hand” would have been readily intelligible to Jonson or his audience. However, we get the same sense of solitary pleasures, and on firmer ground, if we read “child of my right hand,” with David Lee Miller, as “child of my write hand,” child of my writing hand.⁸ The metaphoric substitution of child and work that elides the mother by turning sexual procreation into solitary male creation, fully explicit in line 10 of the poem, is an ancient one: in the *Symposium*, Plato has Diotima suggest that we should strive for immortality not by begetting children but by begetting *logoi*;⁹ Aristotle chastised poets for liking their poems “as if they were their children, and excessively so,”¹⁰ and we have already seen how Montaigne, one of the most insightful thinkers of fatherhood, comments on Aristotle’s passage in turn.

The first line has begun to flimmer, and there is a strong sense of *hysteron proteron* in the air. Dead Benjamin, to be immortalized, that is to say, reanimated, in writing, is already nothing but written; he has already become a poem. The farewell to the boy himself is accomplished in the moment it is spoken. We will learn nothing more about him, his looks, his likes or dislikes, his strengths, his temperament, his idiosyncratic being. Only that he was seven years old, an age at which, as Joshua Scodel has pointed out,¹¹ he would have entered the world of men and masculinity. The first line erases his name and substitutes for it its translation into English, which is also a translation from the individuality of Benjamin's body into the language of the poetry that buries him as a written thing and makes him wholly his father's creation and possession, that which flowed from his right hand. Compare *Epigramme XXII*, "On my first daughter," which names the girl and refers to her mother and her grief twice.¹² By contrast, "On my first Sonne" is, from the beginning, a poem on his father, his right hand, his poetry, and on the equivocal power of writing that brings to life that which it kills in the same stroke.

David Lee Miller, taking recourse to a prophetic vision or dream of his son's death, which Jonson recounted to William Drummond sixteen years later,¹³ suggests that "as Benjamin is the child of his father's right hand, his death is the work of his father's writing hand. In the irrational but imposing logic of this dreamwork, the father's literary vocation has caused his son's death,"¹⁴ but the poem seems to retain little if any trace of the guilt implied here, and the vision, as Miller himself points out, "does quite not say so." Certainly, in the light of what I said about Benjamin's conversion into written language, we could read the following line—"My sinne was too much hope of thee, lov'd boy"—to say that, indeed, the sin consisted in placing too much hope in poetry. But it is precisely in this line and its intimate phrasing that the generic child, for a brief moment, becomes a boy again, reviving the memory of a body that was.

Of course, the traditional hope a father places in his son, especially his first son, is hope for his own survival according to the logic of patrilineal succession that preserves the father's name and body, to the extent that he can think of the son's body as an extension of his own. Everybody is familiar with the Freudian trade according to which, in Debra Bergoffen's words, "the son will sacrifice his desire to the father. The father will sacrifice his place to the son."¹⁵ Substitution, however, is not merely a promise of things to come to the son; it also promises futurity to the father. But it is a fragile one, always under the threat of the body's impermanence, of which a child's death reminds us, if a

reminder we need, more forcefully than any other death precisely because our acquiescence to the logic of succession depends on its repression or denial.

The meaning of the paternal and the filial body are overdetermined, of course. This essay emerges from a book project that thinks of the structure of Western fatherhood as suspended between the incompatible cultural paradigms of Athens and Jerusalem. It should be stressed that I am not trying to revive or retell the story of a dark age that frees itself from the yoke of Christianity by shining onto itself the bright light of antiquity; I am not, in other words, postulating as a negative foil a medieval or premodern period that would be free of the tensions I want to bring out. On the contrary, none of these tensions have been resolved—they are very much with us. Take as an example Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, where it is said that parents love their children, "for they are another self produced by separation from oneself" (*ta gar ex autôn hoion heteroi autoi tôi kechôristhai*, 1161b).¹⁶ It is a pervasive idea that is now flourishing largely under the name of genetics. "I want to continue my bloodline" is one of the reasons most frequently cited today by the men and women who seek out the services of the assisted reproduction industry, and parents, at least some parents, still speak of their children as their "own flesh and blood."¹⁷ The gaze that sees in the child another self, a being both *heteros* and *autos*, same and other, is fatherhood's most enduring feature; it is the *méconnaissance* of parenthood, a recognition that is always also a misrecognition, a second mirror stage that seeks wholeness where it is not to be found.

However common the notion of the child as an extension of its parents' body may be, it is still startling to read Aristotle likening a father's children to his hair or his teeth,¹⁸ parts of the body that, while deplorably detachable from a man's body, can hardly be said to lead a separate existence. It would be wrong to say that Aristotle takes the trope of the child as part of its father's body literally—if a child is like a tooth or like hair, according to the logic of metaphor and simile, it is also, in important regards, not like them.¹⁹ I am not picking nits—fatherhood not only lives off metaphor, it is itself structured like metaphor, always subject to the tension of similarity and difference. Aristotle's biology, which has often been misconstrued, is a case in point. Scholars have claimed, for instance, that "Aristotle . . . argued that women contributed nothing to generation other than the womb in which the fetus develops" or that he believed that the "female produces no seed"²⁰ or that he was "obsessed with the need to prove that women play no genetic part in reproduction."²¹ Nothing, however, could be farther from the truth—in fact, Aristotle argues that

men contributed nothing to generation but one very specific, immaterial component, “sentient soul,” soul that is *aisthêtikos*. Whatever is material in a man’s seed evaporates after conception, and the male contribution is so tenuous that Aristotle feels a need to explain why women cannot generate children without men. Sperm animates menstrual blood the way metaphor animates words; in Laqueur’s paraphrase, “sperma . . . does its work by intellection.”²²

So the child is said to be of the father’s body, but the very semiotic system that supports fatherhood also demotes the body and associates it with the female. While the perfect child, as we can also learn from the *Generation of Animals*, resembles its father perfectly, the far more common imperfect child does not. Male seed sets the process of fetal formation into motion, but its results are highly unreliable, rendering fathering a haphazard process of automimesis at a distance: “by a ‘male’ animal we mean one which generates in another,” Aristotle explains.²³ Once again, the child appears to be suspended between self and other, here between the male self and the female other.

Both the promise and the misery of fatherhood depend on that highly unstable relationship between identity and difference. It is impossible to be happy without children, Aristotle says in the *Ethics*, but it is worse to have bad ones and worse (or even worse?) to have good ones who die.²⁴ Bad children and dead children demonstrate above all that the balance of sameness and otherness, that is to say, the very promise of fatherhood, cannot be controlled. In death and in badness, children assert their otherness without relinquishing their hold on the father’s self. Once father, always father, to the dead or to the living. Once father, always split in the contemplation or the memory of a body that is and is not yours.

The same, of course, holds true for Christian paternity, but the uncertain status of the father’s and the fragility of the son’s body are more easily set aside: the monotheistic model grounds and stabilizes paternity metaphysically, in the image of the omnipotent absolute father, who creates asexually and ex nihilo. While the human father can do neither, his position is yet guaranteed by the divine father, who can, and the most powerful trope of father-son relations is filicide—Abraham and Isaac, God and Jesus. Greek fatherhood, by contrast, is a far more complex, far more varied, and far more dangerous affair, both on the divine and on the human level. It is marked not only by powerful female divinities but by sexual congress, both between gods and goddesses and between gods and humans, rivaling models of procreative biology, various stories of dubious paternity, contested political models of paternal rule, and,

most important, tales of divine and human patricide, a theme noticeably absent from the Bible.²⁵

Greece, too, has its share of filicidal fantasies, but there is a noticeable difference. Tantalus serves his son Pelops to the gods, but Pelops is resurrected and Tantalus is severely and eternally punished. Laius has Oedipus exposed on Kithairon, but Oedipus survives, kills Laius, and ends up as Athens' highly revered guardian corpse. Agamemnon sacrifices Iphigeneia to the military interest of the state, but Iphigeneia is saved and Agamemnon is slain by his wife. Both Uranus and Cronus attempt to kill their children, but neither of them succeeds and both lose their power in the process. The God of the Bible is an absolute father, who demands and performs filial sacrifice; the highest God of Olympus, Zeus, is a virtual patricide.²⁶

In this light, it is not surprising that Freud takes recourse to Greek mythology in his sustained (if ultimately ambivalent) attack on monotheism, and it is not surprising that the substitution of child and writing appears to be far more important to antiquity than to Christianity. As Helmut Puff has pointed out to me, the trope of the spiritual child is common enough in pre-modern writing, but it appears to be far less securely tied to the promise of secular immortality—perhaps simply because the desire for secular immortality is in itself suspect in the religious context.

In Jonson's poem, however, the two models I could only sketch schematically meet in a series of inversions and subversions.

Lines 7 and 8—"To have so soone scap'd worlds, and fleshs rage, / And, if no other miserie, yet age"—appear to invoke the Christian *vanitas* motif, but it is striking that God is entirely absent from lines 3 and 4—"Seven yeeres tho'wert lent to me, and I thee pay, / Exacted by thy fate, on the just day." Instead, Jonson speaks of the child in a series of financial metaphors that culminate in the image of a currency owed not to God but to fate, Fortuna. Jonson's *cri de coeur*, "O, could I loose all father, now," by scholarly *opinio communis* suggesting that the speaker wishes he could give up his own paternity—since dead children are worse than no children—may as well allude to a desire to be no longer subject to that which will soon be called the all-father, the omnipotent paternal god who has already been written out of the transaction, just as the first line had successfully erased the mother.

Jonson, then, is on the way to his own absolute fatherhood here, a self-construction that depends on the absence of the woman who makes paternity possible and yet contaminates it and of the God who grounds fatherhood and

yet necessarily subverts it as well, as any particularization of an absolute is both founded and undermined by the absolute. Last of all, in the sharpest of these ironies, this kind of absolute fatherhood depends on the death of the son's body and the repression of his separate identity.

And yet the dead son must be made to speak again because, once the logic of succession has been inverted, he is the one who must acknowledge his father's fatherhood.

Rest in soft peace, and, ask'd, say here doth lye
Ben. Jonson his best piece of poetrie.

Rest in soft peace, but do not rest, speak. Say "here lies" or "say here," that is, in this poem, who you are. But who is he, and who's asking?

"Ben Jonson." Alongside the son, the father has buried himself, it seems, for a moment at least, before that peculiar genitive construction resurrects him. If the son will not carry the name of the father forward, the poem will, and more securely, within and into that life that is not life. Here lies not Ben Jonson, as we were startled into thinking for one second, but his best piece of poetry, which, as it happens, is or was also called Ben Jonson but is not Ben Jonson because Ben Jonson père has erased the name of Ben Jonson fils to replace it with his own, signed onto his son's poetic gravestone, and there is, again, only one of them. Or is there? There is that flimmer again, the slide between sameness and otherness in the triad of father, son, and poem, an oscillation too rapid to see clearly. Filicide shades into suicide and perhaps for the same reasons that will eventually lead nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers to declare the death of the author.

It is not so much that we lose sight of the meaning we might variously call the dominant, the intended, the obvious, the benign one. As Booth puts it, "The couplet . . . is a box; the word poetrie, its second rhyme word, closes it. The same word completes a noun phrase that allows us to brush away the last of the tiny, fleetingly misleading incidental signals that heighten our mental achievement in finally seeing the justice of the lines—in seeing that *Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry* equals 'my son'" (1998, 83).

We might be "allowed" to "brush away" any lingering doubt here, but should we? Miller, much more hesitantly, comments on those same lines as follows: "[T]he poem's rhetorical coup is to convince us . . . that what we hear in this language is a chastened father's diffidence toward art, not the gratified

mastery of a Virgil or a Phidias admiring his own handiwork." But there is still more going on here than the "boast" (2003, 173) of the master craftsman who knows full well that "On my first Sonne" is a very fine piece of poetry indeed, even though I am not convinced that, again Miller, "the 'sin' to which Jonson confesses is not that his son pleased him too much, but one much harder to acknowledge: that he took too much pleasure in his other creations." Jonson, after all, is still taking pleasure, the pleasure of self-creation, the pleasure of survival, and he doesn't sound penitent to me. "Why will man lament the state he *should* envie" implies that this man does not, that he'll rather take flesh's rage and the miseries of age, thank you very much. When David lost his son, he cried out, "O my son, O my son Absalom, Absalom my son! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son!" When Aegius saw the black sails that seemed to announce the death of his son Theseus, he drowned himself in the sea. Jonson, by contrast, laments the loss of a piece of poetry, a loss that is, moreover, immediately recovered in the act.

"Here lyes Ben Jonson," then, also means, and it would be the same spelling, "here, Ben Jonson is telling lies," but are they lies about his son, lies about poetry, lies about himself and his grief? Or might they be all of that, but at the same time, the truth of an age that is beginning to tentatively prepare for the death of God, for an immanent and impermanent world in which the secular immortality of writing is by far the best bet? I think that the poem's many readers are too eager to assimilate the poem to the structure of Christian theology; expecting a reference to the monotheistic God, they miss his absence from this poem that in fact so radically secularizes fatherhood that it comes close to destroying it altogether: "here lyes / Ben Jonson" if it were not for his poetry.

Which brings us to the last couplet: "For whose sake, hence-forth, all his vows be such, / As what he loves may never like too much." Booth has extensively commented on these generally undercommented lines, starting out with "I assume that readers go away from the poem having understood those last two lines as the poet's vow never again to make the mistake of being too fond of what he loves" (1998, 86–87). He goes on to point out that "to like," at the time, also meant "to please," as in "If this play do not like, the Devil is in't," and he refers us to one of Martial's epigrams: *quidquid ames, cupias non placuisse nimis* (you should desire that whatever you may love may not be too pleasing)—again, a rather disturbing parallel, seeing that Martial is addressing a friend whose servant boy died. I take Booth at his word when he says that "no editor I know of explicates the last couplet," but the editor of my edition,

while not explicating it, either, rather strikingly, and without any further comment, annotates *like* as “to thrive”—“may what I love never thrive too much?” Surely not! Could filicide be written in here as clearly as that? I’d rather go to yet another usage of *like*, one that the *Oxford English Dictionary* paraphrases as “to fashion in a certain likeness,” “to represent as like to,” “bearing a faithful resemblance to the original,” “to make a likeness of; to imitate,” as in “Her lily hand (not to be lik’d by Art).”

If we choose that meaning, then, the shadow of what I have called the father’s *méconnaissance* hangs over the last couplet: “may what he loves never be too much of a likeness” or even “may I learn how to love that which is not like me.” May the father cease to think of his son as a mirror of his self, may he release the son to his otherness. And even if the son’s separate existence here appears only in its negation, “On my first Sonne” allows us to see it, that yet to come liberation of father and son from the twin logics that demand filicide and patricide. Which might, in the end, set poetry free as well.

NOTES

1. I am exclusively concerned with fatherhood, and within fatherhood almost exclusively with the fathering of sons. The dynamic of mother-child or father-daughter relationships are as interesting but quite different.

2. Plato 1999, 275e–276a.

3. Montaigne 1928, 2.88.

4. “The love for one’s children is always unhappy; it is at bottom the only love that rightfully deserves to be called by that name [i.e., unhappy].” Schnitzler 1993, 59 (my translation).

5. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161b.

6. Jonson 1968, 20.

7. Booth 1998, 67–68.

8. Miller 2003.

9. Plato 1996, 208e–209a.

10. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1168a.

11. Scodel 1991, 97.

12. “Here lyes to each her parents ruth, / *Mary*, the daughter of their youth: / Yet, all heavens gifts, being heavens due, / It makes the father, lesse, to rue. / At sixe moneths end, she parted hence / With safetie of her innocence; / Whose soule heavens queen, (whose name she beares) / In comfort of her mothers teares, / Hath plac’d amongst her virgin-traine: / Where, while that sever’d doth remaine, / This grave partakes the fleshly birth. / Which cover lightly, gentle earth.”

13. “When the King came in England, at that tyme the pest was in London, he being in the country at Sir Robert Cotton’s house with old Camden, he saw in a vision his

eldest son, then a child and at London, appear unto him with the mark of a bloody cross on his forehead, as if it had been cutted with a sword; at which, amazed, he prayed unto God; and in the morning he came to Mr Camden's chamber to tell him, who persuaded him it was but an apprehension of his fantasy, at which he should not be disjected. In the meantime comes there letters from his wife of the death of that boy in the plague. He appeared to him, he said, of a manly shape, and of that growth that he thinks he shall be at the resurrection." William Drummond, quoted in Miller 2003, 165.

14. Ibid., 166.

15. Bergoffen 2000, 18.

16. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161b.

17. See for example Cain 2003: "We are a peaceful people, but not a cowardly people. We defend ourselves, when needed, with our own flesh and blood."

18. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1161b.

19. Fenucci and Brownlee 2001, 5.

20. Zoja 2001, 121.

21. Keuls 1985, 100.

22. Laqueur 1990, 54–55.

23. Aristotle, *Generation of Animals*, 716a.

24. "A man of very ugly appearance or low birth, or childless and alone in the world, is not our idea of a happy man, and still less so perhaps is one who has children or friends that are worthless, or who has had good ones but lost them by death." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099b.

25. There is only a single story of patricide in the Bible (Isaiah 37:38), and it is fairly obscure. Sennacherib, an exceptionally cruel and, worse, idolatrous king, is killed by his sons, whom he had meant to sacrifice to his false gods. Importantly, not the patricides but their brother ascends to his throne.

26. Zeus could not kill Cronus, since gods are immortal, but immobilizing him by imprisonment seems close enough.

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“Give Sorrow Words”

EMOTIONAL LOSS AND THE ARTICULATION OF TEMPERAMENT IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Michael Schoenfeldt

“All bad poetry springs from genuine feeling.”

—Oscar Wilde

“The greatest thing on this Earth is being able to feel something.”

—Sam Phillips (founder of Sun Records)

IN HIS RECENT STUDY OF THE ADVERSE ROLES OF PASSION in Western literature, Philip Fisher writes:

No topic in our culture shows such persistence and self-identity even in passing through the phase of Christian theology as the account of the passions of the soul from the time of Homer, Plato, and Aristotle to the edge of modernity with Descartes, Spinoza, Hobbes, and Hume, and then continuing in the later reprise of this work in Darwin and modern scientific psychology.¹

If there is a passion that is the constant companion of dead and dying lovers, the subject of this collection, it is grief. In this essay, I will look at the physiology of grief in the era we somewhat narcissistically call the early modern period. I will try to locate this powerful emotion amid the fecund incoherence with which early modern culture confronted the passions. I want in particular to explore the ways that this singular physiology imagined that speech might be an effective venue for purging the fierce and corrosive emotion of grief. I will then glance at two plays that Shakespeare builds around contested responses to grief and mourning—*Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*—to suggest some possible connections between the declared physiological need to speak grief and the emergence of a model of personality based on its experience of emotion. I

want, then, to see how we move from a paradigm in which emotion is something that affects the individual from the outside to a paradigm in which emotion becomes the identifying medium of that individual.

I am particularly interested in grief because its imagined physiology challenges some of the paradigms I explored in a book I published a few years ago, *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England*.² In that book, I argued that Galenic physiology provided early modern individuals with a discourse of corporeal regulation that demarcated the inner spaces of the subject. But by emphasizing the salutary aspects of corporeal regulation that recent criticism had largely ignored, I did not give the phenomenon of emotion the full and textured attention it deserves, and I failed in particular to attend to the comparatively anomalous emotion of grief.

Grief, first of all, is imagined in the taxonomy of early modern moral philosophy to be a passion of the mind. It is listed as one of the non-naturals, which is just another way of saying that it is not one of the seven natural things: elements, qualities, humors, members, faculties, operations, and spirits. The six non-naturals, influences on health and character, are climate, exercise, food and drink, sleep, sex, and the passions of the mind. As non-naturals, the passions are both a product of and alien to the creature they inhabit. When Thomas Wright, author of a popular seventeenth-century book called *The Passions of the Minde*, attempts to explain human mood swings—"why sometimes wee feelee our selves, we know not why, moved to mirth, melancholy, or anger: insomuch that any little occasion were sufficient to incense that Passion"—he does so by recourse to the interactions among the various non-naturals and the humors,

for, as these humors depend upon the heavens, aire, sleepe, and waking, meat and drinke, exercise and rest, according to the alterations of these externall causes, one or other Humour doth more or lesse over-rule the body, and so causeth an alteration of Passions.³

The early modern individual was subject to a raging torrent of passions, which threatened perpetually to overwhelm the fragile edifice of moral autonomy. The passions involved any feeling by which the mind is powerfully affected or moved. They entail a vehement, commanding, or overwhelming force, whose power is to be feared. They were something one suffered, as the etymology from the Latin word for suffering, *passus*, indicates. One was identified not so much by the passions one experienced as by one's success at controlling them. As John

Donne remarks in a sermon, "in sudden and unpremeditate prayer, I am not alwayes I. . . Passions and affections sometimes, sometimes bodily infirmities . . . aliens me, withdraws me from my self, and then that prayer is not my prayer."⁴ It is striking that in this ethical regime passion proves the medium of alienation rather than identification.

The early modern period inherited from classical ethics and Galenic physiology a deep suspicion about all forms of passion. Cicero's advice epitomizes the classical Stoic prescription for the person suffering from passion.

There is only one method of cure: one must say nothing about what kind of thing disturbs the soul but must address the disturbance itself. Thus first of all in dealing with an actual desire, since it matters only that it be eradicated, one must not inquire whether that which incites the desire is good or not, but one must eradicate the desire itself . . . even if it is an over-ardent desire for virtue itself.⁵

Fascinatingly, passion is so endemically disturbing that Cicero even censures an excessive desire for virtue.

Many early modern moral philosophers followed the Stoics in arguing that moral and mental health is achieved only by means of a state of deliberate apathy, whereby the turbulent internal phenomena known as passions have been purged completely. Other thinkers, though, wanted not so much to banish the passions as to manage them, redirecting them toward virtuous goals. Plato, Aristotle, and Augustine all assume the central importance of the passions and consider ethical activity to lie not in evicting them but rather in properly orienting and managing them. In *A Treatise of the Passions and Faculties of the Soule of Man*, Edward Reynolds, a seventeenth-century moral philosopher, disagrees with those Stoics who would make

Passion in generall to be . . . a Sicknesse and Perturbation, and would therefore reduce the Mind to a senseless Apathie, condemning all Life of Passion, as Waves, which serve onely to tosse and trouble Reason. An Opinion, which, while it goeth about to give unto Man an absolute government over himselfe, leaveth scarce any things in him, which he may command and governe. . . . [T]here is more honour, in the having Affections subdued, than having none

at all; the businesse of a wise man, is not to be *without* them, but to be *above* them.⁶

Even those such as Reynolds who defend the efficacy of passions nonetheless admit that they are volatile phenomena in need of careful and continual monitoring.

Grief, moreover, is a particularly dangerous passion because of its peculiar physiology. A cold and desiccating passion, grief is contrary to the two qualities most conducive to life, heat and moisture. As Thomas Elyot observes in his popular manual *The Castell of Helthe* (1541):

There is nothyng more ennemye to lyfe than sorowe, callyd also hevynes, for it exhausteth bothe naturall heate and moisture of the bodye, and dothe extenuate or make the body leane, dulleth the wytte, and darkeneth the spirites, letteth the use and judgement of reason, and oppresseth memorye. And Salomon {6.17} sayth, that sorowe dreith up the bones.⁷

The desiccations of grief, moreover, could lead the heart to shrink, and to freeze. In *The Passions of the Minde*, Thomas Wright describes well the chilling symptomology of grief.

[T]he Passions which coarct [contract] the heart, as feare, sadnesse, and despaire, as they bring more paine to the minde, so they are more dangerous to the body; . . . and many have lost their lives with sadnesse and feare, but few, with love and hope. . . . The cause why sadnesse doth so move the forces of the body, I take to be, the gathering together of much melancholy blood about the heart, which collection extinguisheth the good spirits, or at least dulleth them; besides, the heart being possessed by such an humour, cannot digest well the blood and spirits, which ought to be dispersed thorow the whole body, but converteth them into melancholy, the which humour being cold and drie, dryeth the whole body, and maketh it wither away; for colde extinguisheth heate, and drynesse moisture, which two qualities principally concerne life. These Passions prevaile often so much with men, that they languish away and die.⁸

Indeed, as David Cressy notes, in the London bill of mortality for 1665, forty-six deaths were attributed to grief.⁹

The death of friends and spouses evokes some of the most devastating accounts of the pernicious aspects of emotional loss. In the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, that compendium of grief management, Robert Burton describes how those who suffer the death of friends experience "so grievous a torment for the time, that it takes away their appetite, desire of life, extinguisheth all delights, it causeth deep sighs and groans, tears, exclamations, . . . howling, roaring, many bitter pangs."¹⁰ Discussing the death of his spouse, the moral and medical philosopher Sir Kenelm Digby eloquently portrays his internal agony as a "corrosive masse of sorrow lying att my hart wch will not be worne away until it have worne me out."¹¹ Digby resolutely argues that standard stoic responses to grief (like those Gertrude and Claudius offer Hamlet) proceed "rather from a stupide and brutall nature then from vertue and magnanimitie: if it be vertue, I confesse not onely my stomake is too weake to digest it, but even my braine to apprehend it." Sorrow, he says, "benumbeth and freezeth all ones spirits and faculties," explaining in experiential terms the physiological connection between grief and cold. He even begins to sound like Marlowe's Dr. Faustus or Milton's Satan when he proclaims that the relentless grief he suffers is akin to eternal perdition; because of the death of his beloved, he bemoans, "I shall always carry my hell about with me wheresoever I am."¹²

When one could not overrule such dangerous internal forces, more aggressive medical therapies were recommended to remove that "corrosive mass of sorrow lying att my hart." In the casebooks of the physician John Hall, Shakespeare's son-in-law (published in the seventeenth century under the wonderful title *Observations on English Bodies*), we can see the typical response to the disease most frequently linked with grief—melancholy. The prescribed therapy is aggressive physiological purgation by every means available, as if purgation of the interior material cause would cure a malady we would classify as psychological. When a seventeen-year-old young woman was "miserably afflicted with Melancholy," Hall first prescribed two enemas, "by which the Humor was rendered more obsequious." He then bled the patient, applying leeches to the hemorrhoidal veins, then purged her with the herb *Helleborus niger*, then subjected her to more enemas, and when she was recovering prescribed a laxative wine.¹³ What we see here is the attempt to achieve a kind of emotional catharsis via physiological means, purging the harmful substances thought to cause the disorder.

With grief, though, the physiological discourse makes available other, less invasive modes of purgation. Sighing, groaning, and weeping—the physical manifestations of grief—were for the most part encouraged in the medical literature, because they were thought to have a deeply therapeutic function. As Pierre de la Primaudaye, author of a popular work on natural and moral philosophy entitled *The French Academie*, remarks: “For howsoever grieffe shutteth up the heart. . . . Yet by groning, sighing, and weeping, the heart doth in some sort open it selfe, as if it would come foorth to breathe, least being wholly shut up with sorrow it should be stifled.”¹⁴ In *A Treatise of Melancholy*, Timothy Bright argues that sighing

hath no other cause of moving then to coole and refresh the heart, and with fresh breath, and pure ayre, which is the nourishment and food of the vitall Spirits, besides the cooling which the heart it selfe receiveth thereby . . . it easeth the heart to weep and sob. . . . These vapours cause that redness in the Cheekes, and about the Eares of those that weepe, heateth the Face, and causeth the Head to ake, whereof the Heart being eased, receiveth a farther enlargement then at the beginning of the grieffe, and so enjoyeth that final comfort which weeping affordeth.¹⁵

Bright offers here a remarkable phenomenology of the experience of sorrow. Sighing and sobbing give relief by expelling the smoky and sooty vapors that collect within the heart, although if they are too vehement the sighs can dangerously shake the heart.¹⁶ According to Bright, tears are “the excrementitious humiditie of the brayne.”¹⁷ One “signifieth by shower of teares, what storme tosseth the afflicted Heart, and overcasteth the cheerfull countenance.”¹⁸ One finds relief in weeping because the deleterious passion is assuaged when its effects are carried away through the nostrils and the eyes.

I want to suggest that the same physiology that encouraged sighing as a therapeutic opening of the heart and crying as a purgation of malicious humors also underpins a developing emphasis on the physiological and psychological necessity of speaking grief. Verbal ventilation here assumes the function of physiological purgation and recurs throughout the various scenes of grief that litter the Shakespearean corpus. In Shakespeare’s bloody early revenge tragedy *Titus Andronicus*, for example, Marcus, when confronted with the maimed and raped Lavinia—she has had her hands cut off and her tongue

pulled out and so is particularly poorly equipped to utter her own intense grief—observes that “sorrow concealed, like an oven stopped, / Doth burn the heart to cinders where it is” (2.4.36–37).¹⁹ Shakespeare’s erotic narrative poem “Venus and Adonis” articulates suppressed grief in strikingly similar terms: “An oven that is stopped, or river stayed, / Burneth more hotly, swelleth with more rage. / So of concealed sorrow may be said, / Free vent of words love’s fire doth assuage” (ll. 331–34). In *Macbeth*, Malcolm urges the distraught and stunned Macduff to utter rather than suppress his extreme grief over the slaughter of his family: “Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak, / Whispers the o’er-fraught heart, and bids it break” (4.3.210–11). Grief is imagined in terms of a pressure that builds up in the suffering subject and must be released through words or that subject will be harmed. Speech here seems to possess some of the powers that Primaudaye and others bestow on sighing and physiological purgation—the capacity literally to jettison a harmful substance, and to open up a heart in danger of constricting itself to the point of suffocation. Carla Mazzio has recently described how love melancholy frequently interrupts speech, rendering the grieving subject inarticulate and unable to express through speech its internal suffering; here we can see how perilous that can be, since it deprives the grieving subject of the partial relief of speech.²⁰

Indeed, without such relief, madness and even death can be the result of grief. In *Titus Andronicus*, a play designed through its extravagant violence and extreme suffering to explore how grief turns to grievance, and emotion to madness, Lucius remarks:

I have heard my grandsire say full oft
Extremity of griefs would make men mad,
And I have read that Hecuba of Troy
Ran mad for sorrow.

(4.1.18–21)

The figure of Hecuba is of course one that would haunt Shakespeare throughout his career. Whereas in *Hamlet* she represents a kind of uncensored emotional outpouring that Hamlet envies—“What’s Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba, / That he should weep for her?” Hamlet asks of a player who has been moved to tears reciting a speech about her (2.2.536–37)—in *Titus* she exemplifies the threat of extreme grief to the sanity of the grieving subject.

Indeed, because of such threats, there emerges in the period a powerful and widespread moral discourse discouraging the indulgence of grief. "Excessive grief," remarks Michael MacDonald, "was a topic that preoccupied contemporary writers. Dramatics, casuists, preachers, and physicians all cautioned against its deleterious effects."²¹ As G. W. Pigman observes in his excellent study of the lyric effects of grief, the English "are acutely anxious about grief, which they regard as subversive of the rule of reason. . . . The major purpose of consolation is to induce the bereaved to suppress grief."²² A popular sermon by Thomas Playfere is entitled *The Meane in Mourning* (1597), and urges the mourner to realize that excessive mourning (which seems to be anything more than a couple of weeks at most) shows, in Claudius's words, a "will most incorrect to heaven."²³ Based on Luke 23.28 ("Weep not for me, but for yourselves") and dedicated to Elizabeth Carey, the sermon emphasizes that grieving may sometimes be necessary but should never be indulged: "The fire being but a little sprinkled with water burneth more brightly but being too much overwhelmed, it gives neither heate, nor light." The general advice defines the corrosive nature of grief: "As a moth freateth the garment, and a worme eateth the wood; so heaviness hurteth mans hart."²⁴ The historian David Cressy has observed that there was much contention "in Elizabethan and Stuart England about the propriety and protocols of mourning, in particular who should mourn, how to mourn, and for how long mourning should be observed."²⁵ I want to think about how Shakespeare in his plays of grief investigates the tension between a moral discourse warning against the indulgence of mourning and a physiological discourse encouraging the verbal ventilation of grief. This tension must have proven even more excruciating at a time in which the relations between the living and the dead were in the process of profound alteration, as Stephen Greenblatt has demonstrated in his study of the changing status of purgatory in Protestant England.²⁶ No longer was it an accepted part of religious doctrine that the living could intervene in the purgatorial existence of the dead, and no longer could the dead communicate their unfinished business to the living. Yet prayers for the dead of course continued to be whispered, and the sense that the dead might revisit as ghosts could not be fully exorcized. As Cressy remarks, "A picture emerges of a hybrid religious culture, in which reformed and unreformed elements intermingled while being pressured towards conformity."²⁷ It is this hybrid religious culture that allows ghosts from Catholic purgatory to populate the stage in decidedly Protestant England.

The gap between emotional experience and public duty, between public protocols of mourning and the inner experience of irreconcilable loss, establishes the parameters of the initial dispute between Hamlet and Claudius. Claudius's and Gertrude's words indeed voice the purportedly comforting moral platitudes of the moralists and the sermon literature discouraging immoderate mourning. Gertrude sounds like a classical Stoic when she tells Hamlet: "Thou know'st 'tis common, all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (1.2.72–73). While this advice may sound heartless to us, it was exactly the kind of sentiment that was regularly uttered from Protestant pulpits. Addressing not Hamlet's interior grief but rather his external mourning practices, Claudius argues that grieving is merely a necessary familial social performance that Hamlet has already fulfilled.

'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father.
But you must know your father lost a father,
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow.

(1.2.87–92)

For Claudius, grief is not so much a private emotion requiring careful monitoring as a public exhibition of filial piety.

Claudius, moreover, tries to shame Hamlet from his continued mourning by telling him he perseveres in "obstinate condolment," "impious stubbornness," and "unmanly grief" (1.2.93, 94). He appeals here to a common physiological belief that women and children were thought to cry more easily, since their substance was cooler and wetter than men's. Timothy Bright, for example, says that those who weep easily

are almost altogether of a moist, rare, and tender body, especially of brayne and heart, which both being of that temper, carie the rest of the parts into like disposition: this is the cause why children are more apt to weepe, then those that are of greater yeares, and women more then men, the one having by youth the body moist, rare & soft, and the other by sex.²⁸

That it could in turn be shameful for a man to indulge grief is made clear in the discussion of grief in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie*.

Generally to weepe for any sorrow (as one may doe for pitie) is not so decent in a man: and therefore all high minded persons, when they cannot chuse but shed teares, wil turne away their face as a countenance undecent for a man to shew, and so will the standers by till they have suppress such passion, thinking it nothing decent to behold such an uncomely countenance. But for Ladies and women to weepe and shed teares at every little greefe, it is nothing uncomely, but rather a signe of much good nature & meekness of minde, a most decent propertie for that sexe.²⁹

By attacking in public Hamlet's masculine self-control, then, Claudius attempts to coerce Hamlet into giving up his mournful demeanor. This attempt is suffused with dramatic irony, since, as Marshall Grossman argues, "to be manly, Hamlet needs to transmute grief over his father's death and his mother's marriage to anger toward Claudius and to purge this anger through violent action."³⁰ Claudius, though, hopes to convince Hamlet to make peace with the new political order and the novel domestic arrangement achieved through his marriage to Hamlet's mother.

Hamlet's subsequent soliloquy, however, expresses his horror both at his mother's remarriage shortly after his father's death and at the fact that this marriage was to Hamlet's uncle, a marriage that could have been construed as incest.³¹ He remembers that his mother "followed my poor father's body, / Like Niobe, all tears," and he cannot reconcile that image of her extravagant grief with her marriage less than two months later (1.2.148–49). Hamlet's concern over the brevity of his mother's grief is echoed by some early modern moralists, who worried not that mourning was extravagant but that it was at best perfunctory. Cressy quotes John Weever in 1631, complaining that some people did not grieve enough.

[W]e in these days do not weep and mourn at the departure of the dead so much nor so long as in Christian duty we ought. For husbands can bury their wives, and wives their husbands, with a few counterfeit tears, and a sour visage masked and painted over with dissimulation; contracting second marriages before they have

worn out their mourning garments, and sometimes before their
cope-mates be cold in their graves.

Cressy notes how moralists repeatedly complained of superficial mourning and even more of "the speedy remarriage of widows and widowers."³²

The kingdom of Denmark, then, is suffused with disputes over proper modes of grief and mourning. Critical focus on the pervasive idea of revenge has precluded our seeing just how fully the play becomes an extended debate about the proper deployment of grief.³³ Hamlet, of course, is troubled that Gertrude has not mourned enough. Claudius and Gertrude are troubled that Hamlet is still mourning. Laertes is troubled that his father has no funerary monuments and enraged that his sister's funeral lacks the appropriate ceremony because she may have committed suicide. The play shows how improper or congested mourning courses corrosively through the body politic, driving to distraction and death a younger generation, which experiences the internal onslaught of grief deriving from the sudden deaths of parents and have no outlet for this toxic emotion. Claudius offers a typically astute diagnosis of the sources of Ophelia's madness, a diagnosis that could apply to any member of the younger generation in the play: "[T]his is the poison of deep grief, it springs / All from her father's death" (4.5.72–73).³⁴ Such toxic grief flows like a malicious humor throughout the Danish body politic. As Francesco, the sentinel, declares in the opening scene of the play, "'Tis bitter cold, / And I am sick at heart" (1.1.7–8).

The play is designed to explore this heartsickness in all of its manifold infestations. Hamlet's first soliloquy tellingly concludes with the statement: "But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue" (1.2.159). Like Lavinia in *Titus*, he is denied the verbal release urged in the moral and physiological discourse on grief and as a result feels a palpable and potentially malignant pressure on his heart. In the friendship of Hamlet and Horatio, though, and in the kinds of progressively intimate speech that these two protagonists represent, Shakespeare suggests the possible rewards as well as the hazards of affective commitments. Discussing his country's reputation for drunkenness, Hamlet asserts a particularly materialist account of behavior, and of tragedy.

So, oft it chanches in particular men,
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
As, in their birth—wherein they are not guilty,

Since nature cannot choose his origin—
 By their o'ergrowth of some complexion
 Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,
 Or by some habit that too much o'erleavens
 The form of plausible manners, that these men
 Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect,
 Being nature's livery, or fortune's star,—
 His virtues else—be they as pure as grace,
 As infinite as man may undergo—
 Shall in the general censure take corruption
 From that particular fault.

(1.4.18.7–18.20)

This long digression—often cut in performance and only present in Quarto 1, not the First Folio—allows Shakespeare to explore the ways in which physiological predilection or circumstantial corruption can infect the entire organism. Reason here is a fort, a military edifice easily undermined by subterranean, uncontrollable forces. The determinism Hamlet describes, which is at once astrological, circumstantial, and physiological, suggests that one's "complexion," or humoral complex (the word did not yet mean skin color, but only used skin color as an indication of one's inner temperament), can undo the deliberate moral aspirations of grace and virtue.

This pithy description of the pernicious workings of some "vicious mole of nature" also gives point to Hamlet's praise of Horatio as one whose well-balanced complexion has achieved a relative immunity to such corruption.

for thou hast been,
 As one, in suff'ring all, that suffers nothing,
 A man that Fortune's buffets and rewards
 Hath ta'en with equal thanks; and blest are those
 Whose blood and judgement are so well commingled
 That they are not a pipe for Fortune's finger
 To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
 That is not passion's slave, and I will wear him
 In my heart's core, ay in my heart of heart,
 As I do thee.

(3.2.58–67)

Hamlet's praise of Horatio's stoic resolve reveals something enormously valuable in the principles of regulating, and even eradicating, passions such as grief. Unlike those whose complexion suffers some undertow or overgrowth that ultimately pulls down the walls of reason, Hamlet identifies in Horatio a figure whose humoral complexion is "well commingled." Hamlet admires, and even envies, Horatio's capacity to master his passions. The audience is allowed to glimpse something admirable, as well as something deeply limited, in the hyper-rationality buttressing this stoic demeanor.³⁵ Critical reception of the play, though, has tended to value Hamlet's profound wrestling with his unruly passions, and his fastidious articulation of the myriad affections suffusing his "heart of heart," over Horatio's comparatively bland survival tactics of prophylactic self-control.

The friendship of Hamlet and Horatio, moreover, provides a fascinating contrast to the court of Denmark's network of superficial obligations and hypocritical allegiances. In such a world, sincere and salutary expressions of grief evaporate in an atmosphere of deference and sycophancy. In pointed contrast to the mercenary model of friendship exemplified by Hamlet's relationship with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, or the asphyxiating experience of erotic betrayal shared by both Hamlet and Ophelia, Hamlet's friendship with Horatio provides a model of gradually developing trust and intimacy. The friendship seems to fulfill the pharmacological function of friendship identified by Sir Francis Bacon in his essay on the subject.

A principal fruit of friendship is the ease and discharge of the fulness and wellings of the heart, which passions of all kinds do cause and induce. We know diseases of stoppings and suffocation are the most dangerous in the body; and it is not much otherwise in the mind: you may take sarza [sarsaparilla] to open the liver, steel to open the spleen, flowers of sulphur for the lungs, costoreum for the brain; but no receipt openeth the heart, but a tried friend, to whom you may impart griefs, joys, fears, hopes suspicions counsels, and whatsoever lieth upon the heart to oppress it, in a kind of civil shrift or confession.³⁶

Bacon offers here a telling critique of what we would call repression, suggesting that just as bodies must flow in order to be healthy so must the emotions that course through those bodies. Friendship, he seems to suggest, can ventilate grief

and so provide a venue for the safe purging of whatever malicious substance oppresses a heart. Those who have no friends “to open themselves unto are,” according to Bacon “cannibals of their own hearts.”³⁷

In her searching study of early modern friendship, *Sovereign Amity*, Laurie Shannon suggests that in early modern moral literature, “the predominant metaphor for the friend is the medical doctor.”³⁸ Shannon cites Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy*: “When the patient himself is not able to resist or overcome these heart-eating passions, his friends or Physician must be ready to supply that which is wanting.”³⁹ In *Hamlet*, friendship offers at best a temporary immunization against the fatal disease of unrelieved grief, allowing one an outlet for the temporary purging through speech of a pernicious and pervasive grief.⁴⁰ Despite its pharmacological properties, friendship offers a perilous medicine; in a world where a distinction between being and seeming is presumed, one can never read with confidence another human’s emotional commitment. *Hamlet* is divided between the sense that the passion of grief can eat away at a precariously conceived identity—the attitude of Claudius, Gertrude, and Horatio—and a growing sense that one’s identity is bound up with the depth, sincerity, and permanence of one’s affective commitments—the attitude of Hamlet. Hamlet finds that the brevity and mobility of desire—that his mother once loved his father and now loves his uncle or that, as he says to Ophelia, “I did love you once” (3.1.116)—threaten his sense of the stability of any identity and the perdurability of any meaningful emotional bond. Suppressed grief drives a younger generation—Hamlet, Ophelia, and Laertes—to the corollary madresses of extreme anger and extravagant grief before it finally kills them.

In *The Winter’s Tale*, by contrast, Shakespeare explores the way that time, friendship, and grief can begin to undo the pernicious effects of passionate action among an older generation of friends and lovers. In this late romance, Shakespeare remains fascinated by the destructive prospects of grief, for individuals and for cultures; at the same time, the play’s long-term dramatic curve aspires to delineate a mode of redemptive mourning. A play of sudden malevolent passion and delayed expiatory forgiveness, *The Winter’s Tale* focuses on the comic and tragic consequences of emotion. It also suggests a way in which “words,” as Paulina, the central physician to the play’s passionate madness, remarks, might become “as medicinal as true” (2.3.36–37).

Irrationally suspecting his virtuous queen of adultery because of her success at convincing his boyhood friend to lengthen his stay, King Leontes orders Hermione to be imprisoned, his best friend slain, and his newborn daughter

abandoned in the wild. Leontes's disastrous outburst of unjustified jealousy offers a textbook example of the lethal power of unbridled passion. Tellingly, Leontes experiences the onset of jealousy as a violent penetration of his interior being: "Affection, thy intention stabs the centre" (1.2.140). What he aptly calls the "infection of my brains" quickly spreads throughout his kingdom (1.2.147). His young son Mamillius dies "with mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed"; the cause of death is that his heart is "cleft" (3.2.142-43, 194). His wife Hermione swoons, and her friend Paulina announces that the "news [of Mamillius's death] is mortal to the Queen" (3.2.146). Leontes hopes that "her heart is but o'ercharg'd; she will recover" (3.2.147). As in *Hamlet*, the older generation subjects the younger to a series of grievous injuries that distort and ultimately destroy it. As in *Hamlet*, too, the fatal infection continues to spread throughout the body politic. Abandoning under penalty of death Leontes's infant daughter on the seacoast of "Bohemia," Antigonus, Paulina's husband, is ripped apart by a bear, while the boat that brought him there is sunk and all the sailors on it drowned. By the end of act 3, this "romance" presents us with almost as many corpses as we have at the end of *Hamlet*.

After the initial outburst of lethal passion, *The Winter's Tale* then becomes in part a discussion of what forms of mourning might be appropriate to such a terrible self-inflicted loss. In her first approach to the enraged Leontes, Paulina announces that "I / Do come with words as medicinal as true, / Honest as either, to purge him of that humor / That presses him from sleep" (2.3.36-39). The mechanisms of proper purgation, however, prove extremely slow, demanding sixteen long years, during which Leontes experiences the continual application of medicinal words by Paulina and the repeated effusion of purgative tears and cathartic sighs from deep within. Leontes indeed promises that "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where [the bodies] lie, and tears shed there / Shall be my recreation" (3.2.236-38). The pun on *recreation* and *re-creation* underscores the ways that the performance of grief will indeed restore in part some of the excruciating loss. As he announces that sixteen years have passed, the figure of Time assures us, "Th'effects of [Leontes's] fond jealousies so grieving / That he shuts up himself" (4.1.18-19). This extended and largely unrepresentable period of dutiful mourning becomes the source of the play's marvelous blend of sadness and wonder, of "things dying" and "things new-born," of "joy and terror, / Of good and bad" (3.3.104-5, 4.1.1-2).

Characters continue to debate the protocols of mourning, particularly the severe forms in which Paulina brilliantly orchestrates Leontes's remorse.

Sounding a bit like Claudius speaking to Hamlet, the courtier Cleomines tells Leontes in act 5 that he has more than fulfilled the necessary quota of mourning.

Sir you have done enough, and have performed
A saint-like sorrow. No fault could you make
Which you have not redeemed, indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass.

(5.1.1–4)

An athlete of grief, Leontes endures a marathon of self-inflicted suffering. As Camillo declares to Leontes in final scene:

My lord, your sorrow was too sore laid on,
Which sixteen winters cannot blow away,
So many summers dry. Scarce any joy
Did ever so long live; no sorrow
But killed itself much sooner.

(5.3.49–53)

Camillo refers here to the particularly lethal physiology of long-term grief, a physiology that Leontes heroically belies. It is as if Leontes's sixteen-year commitment to his grief, well schooled by Paulina, becomes in its own way a kind of virtuous, even redemptive action, patiently undoing the sudden impetuosity of his destructive jealousy.

The play is fascinated by the ways in which positive and negative emotions can spread like an infection through the body politic. When Perdita, Leontes's lost daughter, hears of her mother's death, we learn that "from one sign of dolor to another she did with an 'Alas', I would fain say bleed tears" (5.2.78–80). Just as the story has a profound effect on her passions, arousing her compassion, so does her powerful emotion affect the compassionate onlookers: "Who was most marble there chang'd color; some swounded, all sorrow'd. If all the world could have seen't, the woe had been universal" (5.2.80–83). The entire scene, told in the third person because it would be so hard to stage without bathos, offers a model of sympathetic spectatorship, reveling in the contagious nature of salutary grief. It mirrors and counters the way that Leontes's malignant jealousy had spread so rapidly in the play's opening scene.

The disputes about appropriate mourning nevertheless continue until the end of the play. If England was indeed divided between a Catholic attachment to ritual and a Protestant suspicion of ritual, Shakespeare here seems to come down clearly on the side of those who argued for the psychological and social efficacy of extensive mourning rituals. Leontes declares to Paulina that "this affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort," punning on the heart, *cor*, the organ most threatened by grief (5.3.76–77). Fascinatingly, Leontes imagines that indulging, even nurturing, his grief is a way of remedying it.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare had similarly explored the way in which passionate attachments can fester into jealousy, destroying both their subject and object. *The Winter's Tale* can in fact be read as a commentary on, and a reversal of, *Othello's* tragic trajectory. Whereas in *Othello* Iago poisons an otherwise healthy mind, in *The Winter's Tale* Paulina cures the passionately infected brain of Leontes. Looming over the sleeping Desdemona, whom he is about to suffocate, Othello compares her skin to "monumental alabaster" (5.2.5). When the statue of Hermione comes to life in the miraculous final scene of *The Winter's Tale*—a scene in which Leontes has been led to expect that he will get to see a statue of his dead queen, executed by the Renaissance master Giulio Romano—some of the tragic violence that can turn living flesh into inert matter is undone. In the place of such fatal violence emerges the magic of compassion, the way that feeling in one human induces feeling in another. Even the most marmoreal of observers and objects prove susceptible to its power. Shakespeare here reverses the conventional pattern of aesthetic recuperation to which he had devoted the first section of his sonnets—here it is not art that preserves what otherwise will decay but rather art that becomes living flesh. "O, she's warm!" exclaims Leontes when he takes her hand, as if moderating his initial perception of intemperate jealousy—"Too hot, too hot" (5.3.109, 1.2.110). The "paddling palms and pinching fingers" that ostensibly provoke this outburst have been finally rendered benign by this cordial touch (1.2.117). The arts of mourning are wedded to the techniques of representation and together produce a consummate act of aesthetic transubstantiation, converting cold marble into warm skin and achieving at least a partial victory over death. It is as if Orpheus finally, for once, did not look back.

The play, then, enacts a mode of grief that kills suddenly but also delineates a mode of mourning that over time becomes partially redemptive. Indeed, *The Winter's Tale* manages in the process to delineate a curve between a definition of passion as something that seizes the subject from the outside and a sense

that emotion emerges from within the suffering subject. “Why was . . . Niobe [turned] into a stone,” asks Robert Burton in the *Anatomy of Melancholy*, “but that for grief she was senseless and stupid.”⁴¹ This powerful and disturbing myth about the power of grief to stupefy and kill is of course behind both *Hamlet* and *The Winter’s Tale*. As Burton continues, he offers physiological explanations for the particular stupefactions of grief.

[S]orrow strikes the heart, makes it tremble and pine away, with great pain; and the black blood drawn from the spleen, and diffused under the ribs on the left side, makes those perilous hypochondriacal convulsions which happen to that are troubled with sorrow.⁴²

But in *The Winter’s Tale*, Leontes’s extreme grief—as extreme in its dilation as is the sudden jealousy that precipitates the real and imagined losses—becomes part of the miracle that invigorates rather than exterminates, bringing the statue of Hermione to life. In *The Winter’s Tale*, Shakespeare weaves the physiology of grief into a statement about the power and limitations of art. The play depicts a mysterious magic by which remorse slowly metamorphoses into redemption, as marble might become living flesh. This dynamic transformation counters the model of sorrow turning one to stone that is at the core of the Niobe story. It entails a kind of elemental necromancy, leading Leontes to declare in the final scene: “If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (5.3.110–11). Eating, that mysterious yet absolutely mundane process by which life is sustained through the assimilation of dead matter, comes to stand for all the play’s miraculous transformations.

By emphasizing the necessity of speaking and performing grief and the harm that ensues from not doing so, both *Hamlet* and *The Winter’s Tale* adapt a principle of physiology to the purposes of dramatic exfoliation. Treating grief as something that could be purged through speech, moreover, these plays show how the passions begin to migrate from external compulsions to internal motives. In these plays, that is, we glimpse how the passions evolve from phenomena the individual was made to suffer into interior sensations that congeal into the bundle of agency and quirks and desires we call personality. Stephen Greenblatt’s startling opening sentence in *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*—“I began with a desire to speak with the

dead"—suggests that the endeavors of literary criticism may spring from the same impulses that this essay has been examining.⁴³ The manifold practices of grief and its relief in language demarcate the habitus of historical literary criticism. By engaging in a deep relationship with texts from a dead past, we aspire to animate them with our sympathy even as we hope to keep them from haunting us. We learn, furthermore, that speaking with the dead is one of the most important ways available to us for addressing the living. Destroyer of bodies and tormentor of souls, grief can nonetheless, when well managed and rigorously articulated, be productive, of selves and of personalities. Exploring the physiology and etiology of grief in these early modern plays, moreover, can tell us much about the genesis of our own notions of identity and emotion. As the medium of purgation for the grieving subject shifts from a physiological fluid to a verbal utterance, even to what Freud would come to call "the work of mourning," we can see that this strange and frequently deleterious physiology yields a response to the pervasive devastation of grief that is recognizable, perhaps even modern.

NOTES

1. Fisher 2002, 32–33.
2. Schoenfeldt 1999.
3. Wright [1604] 1971, 65.
4. Donne 1953–62, 9:219.
5. Cicero *Tusculan Disputations* (4.29.62), quoted in Maus 1984, 98.
6. Reynolds 1640, 47–48.
7. Elyot [1541] 1937, fol. 64r–v.
8. Wright [1604] 1971, 61–63.
9. Cressy 1997, 393.
10. Burton 1977, pt. 1, sec. 2, mem. 4, subs. 7, p. 358.
11. Quoted in Evans 2002, 56. The series of letters that Digby writes to his brother describing his grief in excruciating detail can be read in Gabrielli 1957, 237–83.
12. Evans 2002, 56–57.
13. Hall 1996, 341–43.
14. Primaudaye 1618, 468.
15. Bright 1586, 193.
16. *Ibid.*, 195–96.
17. *Ibid.*, 144.
18. *Ibid.*, 177–78.
19. Quoted from Greenblatt 1997. All subsequent citations of Shakespeare are from this edition.
20. Mazzio 2000, 186–227.

21. MacDonald 1981, 159.
22. Pigman 1985, 2.
23. Playfere 1597, 2–9.
24. Ibid., 6, 8.
25. Cressy 1997, 438.
26. Greenblatt 2001. Dubrow (1999) focuses on the repeated pattern of familial loss in Shakespeare.
27. Cressy 1997, 401–2.
28. Bright 1586, 143.
29. Puttenham 1936, 290. On contemporaneous connections between mourning and misogyny, see Mullaney 1996.
30. Grossman 2003, 190.
31. The idea is based on Lev. 18:16: “Thou shalt not uncover the nakednesse of thy brothers wife: it is thy brothers nakednesse”; and Lev. 20:21: “And if a man shall take his brothers wife, it is an unclean thing” [KJV]. On incest, see Boehrer 1992.
32. Cressy 1997, 395.
33. See, though, Neill 1997, 246, which suggests that “The terrible frenzies of the revenger, that berserk memorialist, can be understood as a fantasy response to the sense of despairing impotence produced by the Protestant displacement of the dead.” I would argue instead that revenge entails the mistaken fantasy that revenge, the mimetic reenactment of an originary act of violence, would restore rather than multiply loss.
34. See, though, Neely 2004, 50–56, in which Neely emphasizes the gender-specific differences between Hamlet’s madness and Ophelia’s.
35. In chapter 3 of Schoenfeldt 1999, I explore the way that Sonnet 94 explores the usefulness, and the limitations, of such hyper-rationality.
36. Bacon 1985, 81.
37. Bacon 1985, 82.
38. Ibid., 192.
39. Ibid.
40. Kirsch (1982, 20) argues that “What a person who is grieving needs, of course, is not the consolation of words, even words which are true, but sympathy,” separating the consolations of purgative speech from the experience of a sympathetic auditor.
41. Burton 1977, 1:260.
42. Ibid., 260–61.
43. Greenblatt 1988, 3.

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INDEX

- Abelard, Peter, 101
 Abraham, 131, 136
 Absalom, 129
 Achilles, 18, 26
 Acton, Harold, 53
 Adam, 11
 Adonis, 4, 5, 27, 41-46, 48-53
 Aeneas, 42, 64
 Agamemnon, 137
 Alan of Lille, 79
 Alexander the Great, 65
 Almodóvar, Pedro, 15
 Andromeda, 31
 Antinous, 45
 Antonius, Marcus, 32-33
 Aphrodite, 41-43, 45, 51-52
 Apostle. *See* Paul, Saint
 Aranda, Vicente, 107
 Archangel Raphael, 11
 Aristophanes, 42
 Aristotle, 133, 135-36, 145
 Arnold, Matthew, 41, 45
 Augustine, Saint, 13, 57-58, 61, 66, 145
 Augustus Caesar (emperor), 5, 24, 28, 30-33
 Bacon, Sir Francis, 155-56
 Bell, William (teacher of English), 39
 Berlioz, Hector, 14
 Bernardino of Siena, Saint, 81
 Bion of Smyrna, 3, 5, 27, 41-47, 51-53
 Boethius, 77
 Bond, Gerald, 77
 Booth, Stephen, 132, 138, 139
 Boreas, 76
 Bory, William, 85
 Bright, Timothy, 148, 151
 Brooke, Rupert, 48-49, 50
 Burton, Sir Richard, 14, 147, 156, 160
 C., Claire, 8-9, 11
 Caelius Rufus, Marcus, 29-30
 Calais, 76-77
 Callimach, Andrew, 76
 Callimachus, 41
 Camilla, 42
 Carter, Howard, 6, 96-97, 99
 Cassius Hemina, Lucius, 100
 Cato "Uticensis" (Marcus Porcius Cato), 64
 Cavafy, Constantine, 47
 Charlemagne, 5, 65-67
 Charles V (emperor), 119
 Chénier, André, 51
 Chloris, 23, 25
 Christ. *See* Jesus Christ
 Cicero (Marcus Tullius Cicero), 24, 29, 30-32, 145
 Claudia, Quinta, 30
 Claudia the Vestal Virgin, 30
 Claudius (*Hamlet*), 147, 150, 151-56
 Claudius Caecus, Appius, 29-31
 Cleopatra, 100
 Clodia, 29-30

- Colonna, Giacomo, 58, 62
 Colonna, Giovanni (cardinal), 65
 Colonna, Stefano (the younger), 60
 Colonna di San Vito, Giovanni, 64
 Conchillos, Lope de (secretary), 115, 120
 Cooper, Dennis, 12
 Cressy, David, 147, 150, 152–53
 Cronus, 137
 Cupid, 41, 47
 Cynthia, 2, 4, 15, 23–31, 33–34

 Dante Alighieri, 63, 66
 David, 77–78, 97, 129, 139
 David Copperfield, 17
 Decadent poets, 5, 44–45, 50, 53
 Deck, Isaiah, 100–101
 Derrida, Jacques, 13
 Desdemona, 13, 15–16, 159
 Dido, 64
 Digby, Sir Kenelm, 147
 Diotima, 10, 133
 Donne, John, 50, 144
 Dorian Gray, 44, 52
 Douglas, Alfred, 45
 Dugas, Gaetan, 14
 Dürer, Albrecht, 5, 71–74, 79–84

 Eliot, T. S., 49
 Elyot, Thomas, 146
 Endymion, 15, 45
 Eros. *See* Cupid
 Euryalus, 42–43
 Eurydice, 1, 3, 5, 8–9, 18, 71, 74–78, 79, 84

 Fernando of Aragon (king), 110, 114, 118
 Fisher, Philip, 143
 Frankenstein, 100
 Frazer, Sir James, 49–50
 Freud, Sigmund, 17, 132, 137
 Fullerton, Morton, 46

 Galen of Pergamum, 2
 Ganymede, 77

 Gautier, Théophile, 14
 Genet, Jean, 17–18
 Gertrude, 147, 151–56
 Girard, René, 17
 God (as father), 136, 137
 Graves, Robert, 40
 Greene, Thomas, 7, 64–65
 Greenblatt, Stephen, 7, 150, 160
 Greyson, John, 14
 Grider, Kelly, 85
 Guthrie, W. K. C., 74, 77

 Halberstadt, Albrecht von, 78
 Hall, Donald, 131
 Hall, John, 147
 Hamlet, 147, 151–56
 Handel, George Frederick, 84
 Hass, Robert, 18
 Hecuba, 149
 Heloise, 101
 Henry VII of England (king), 118
 Hercules, 84
 Hermione, 156–60
 Housman, A. E., 44, 47, 52
 Heathcliff, 12
 Helen of Troy, 11
 Horatio, 153–55
 Hyacinthus, 41, 45, 49
 Hylas, 45
 Hypermetra, 31

 Iphigeneia, 137
 Isaac, 131, 136

 Janan, Micaela Wakil, 28–29, 32
 Jean de Meun, 79
 Jesus Christ, 7, 14, 45, 48, 77, 84, 131, 136
 Jonson, Ben, 3, 6, 128–40
 Jonson, Benjamin (son), 128–40
 Juana I of Castille (queen), 2, 6, 106–20

 Kantorowicz, Ernst, 7, 117
 Keats, John, 42, 44, 46–48, 53

- Kierkegaard, Søren, 11
 Korngold, Erich Wolfgang, 8

 Lacan, Jacques, 16, 28
 Laertes, 153, 154, 156
 Laius, 137
 Lang, Andrew, 41–43, 51
 Laura, 1, 3, 5, 57–61, 65, 67
 Lausus, 42–43
 Lavinia, 153
 Leontes, 156–60
 Lolita, 16
 Loves. *See* Cupid
 Lucan (Marcus Annaeus Lucanus), 64
 Lynd, Laurie, 14

 Mallarmé, Stéphane, 129
 Mantegna, Andrea, 73, 80–83
 Mapplethorpe, Robert, 18
 Martial, 139
 Mártir de Anglería, Pedro, 108, 110, 111
 Martianus Capella, 77
 Maximilian (emperor), 106, 114
 Millay, Edna St. Vincent, 15
 Miller, David Lee, 133, 134, 138–39
 Milton, John, 11, 41, 50, 84
 Mishima, Yukio, 18
 Montaigne, Michel de, 130, 133
 Moses, 101

 Narcissus, 45
 Nicholson, J. G., 45
 Nieto Sori, José Manuel, 112
 Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, 14, 17
 Nisus, 42
 Norman, Jesse, 14
 Numa Pompilius (king), 100–101

 Oeagrus, 76
 Oedipus, 131, 137
 Ophelia, 153, 156
 Orpheus, 3, 5, 8, 18, 41, 71–85, 159
 Osborn, Percy Lancelot, 45, 51

 Osthoff, Wolfgang, 81–82
 Othello, 13, 15–16
 Ovid (Publius Ovidius Naso), 5, 41, 71, 74–78, 81
 Owen, Wilfred, 3–5, 39–40, 42–53

 Padilla, Lorenzo de, 106
 Pallas, 42–43
 Panofsky, Erwin, 82
 Papangelis, Theodore D., 26–27, 29
 Patroclus, 26
 Paul, Saint, 13, 97
 Pausanias, 71
 Pelops, 137
 Penthesilea, 18
 Petrarch (Francesco Petrarca), 3, 5, 7, 57–67
 Phanocles, 76–77
 Philip “the Handsome” (archduke), 106–20
 Plato, 10–12, 16, 47, 129, 133, 145
 Playfere, Thomas, 150
 Pliny the Elder (Gaius Plinius Secundus), 100–101
 Pompeius Magnus, Gnaeus, 65
 Pompey. *See* Pompeius Magnus, Gnaeus
 Postgate, John Percival, 25–27, 29
 Pound, Ezra, 49
 Priam, 64
 Primaudaye, Pierre de la, 148, 149
 Prometheus, 84
 Propertius (Sextus Propertius) 2, 4, 15, 16, 23–34, 41
 Proust, Marcel, 11, 13, 16, 17
 Puttenham, George, 152
 Pyrrhus (Neoptolemus), 64
 Pyrrhus of Epirus (king), 30
 Pythagoras, 101

 Ralph Touchet, 13
 Ramírez de Villaescusa, Diego, 106
 Reynolds, Edward, 145–46
 Rhabanus Maurus, 100

- Rickword, Edgell, 50
 Rienzo, Cola di, 60
 Rilke, Rainer Maria, 17–18
 Rimbaud, Arthur, 48
 Rodenbach, Georges, 9
 Roesler-Friedenthal, Antoinette, 82
 Rolfe, Frederick, 45
 Rome, 2, 3, 30, 57–61, 63–67

 Sassoon, Siegfried, 41, 53
 Schnitzler, Arthur, 130
 Schuster, Klaus-Peter, 82
 Sebastian, Saint, 45
 Seneca the Elder (Lucius Annaeus Seneca), 33
 Shannon, Laurie, 156
 Shelley, Percy Bysshe, 12, 41–42, 46–48, 50, 52
 Sherwood, Bill, 18
 Shilts, Randy, 14
 Shakespeare, William, 3, 7, 13, 143, 148–61
 Silius Italicus (Tiberius Catius Asconius Silius Italicus), 42
 Socrates, 10
 Statius (Publius Papinius Statius), 42
 Steerforth, 14, 17
 Stock, Brian, 77
 Swinburne, Algernon Charles, 44–45, 53
 Symbolist poets, 44, 53

 Tantalus, 137
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 12, 44, 50

 Theseus, 131, 139
 “Tremulous Hand of Worcester,” 6, 98–99
 Troy, 11
 Tutankhamen, 6, 96

 Uranian poets, 5, 45, 47–49, 52
 Uranus, 137
 Uriah, 97

 Valverde de Amusco, Juan, 111
 Varela, Javier, 112
 Venus, 84
 Virgil (Publius Vergilius Maro), 42–43, 45, 50–51, 64, 75–77
 Virtuous Scribe, 78–79

 Warburg, Aby, 80
 Watson, Nicholas, 7
 Waugh, Evelyn, 53
 Weever, John, 152
 Whitman, Walt, 48
 Wickram, Jörg, 78
 Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, Ulrich von, 52, 98
 Wilde, Oscar, 44, 48
 William of Norwich, Saint, 45
 Wind, Edgar, 80
 Wordsworth, William, 39, 47
 Wright, Thomas, 144, 146

 Zeus, 131, 137
 Zoppo, Marco, 81